# The Art of CONVERSATION AND SELF-EXPRESSION

Betty E. Norris

# THE ART OF CONVERSATION

AND

# SELF-EXPRESSION

# THE ART OF CONVERSATION AND SELF-EXPRESSION

By
**BETTY E. NORRIS**
B.A., Dip. Ed. (Lond.)

**D. B. TARAPOREVALA SONS & COMPANY PRIVATE LTD.**
210 DR. DADABHAI NAOROJI ROAD, BOMBAY

Reprinted 1975



PRINTED IN INDIA

Printed and published by Russi J. Taraporevala for D. B. Taraporevala Sons & Co. Pvt. Ltd., 210 Dr. Dadabhai Naoroji Road, Bombay 400 001, at their Electrographic Industries Division, Apte Industrial Estate, Worli, Bombay 400 018.

CONTENTS

The wisdom of Conversation ought not to be over much affected, but much less despised; for it hath not only an honour in itself, but an influence also in business and government.

*—Francis Bacon*

Conversation is an art in which a man has all mankind for his competitors, for it is that which all are practising every day while they live.

*—Emerson*

It is not easy to say how far an affable and courteous manner in conversation may go toward winning the affections.

*—Cicero*

## CHAPTER I

## *THE VALUE AND IMPORTANCE OF CONVERSATION*

---

From primitive ages up to our highly developed present day, man has ceaselessly sought for means of communication between himself and others. Some thinkers go so far as to say that even birds and beasts understand one another through the inarticulate sounds they make, and have their own peculiar languages as their channel of communication, and so it seems that all animate beings recognise speech as an important, perhaps, the most important, means of communicating their thoughts. The inarticulate sounds of primitive man as he drew his few associates around him in conference with his simple thought, and the clear sound of our radio as it brings millions of listeners under its influence, are both creations of the same fundamental desire—man's striving to communicate with his fellow creatures. The normal way for the man in the street to communicate with his fellows is through conversation. Obviously the ordinary person uses his powers of speech more in conversation than in any other form of speaking, for in his daily routine he is not called upon to engage in public speaking, nor in dramatic speech, nor in oratory, etc., but he is called upon to enter into all kinds of conversation of a business, social or general nature.

Granted then that the main purpose of conversation is communication of thought, should we not try to make that means as complete as possible? It has been said that conversation is the "conference of minds"; surely we should derive the greatest benefit from such a "conference" if we had the means at our disposal to put our best into it and get the best out of it.

The greatest value of conversation is in the mental enrichment which results from minds conferring together. To achieve this enrichment our conversation must be comprehensive. The caveman had an easy task in making his conversation sufficiently comprehensive, for there was little to talk about in his small world, and few around him with whom to talk. What simple thoughts were his, what little knowledge his undeveloped brain possessed, how few were the members of society with whom he came in contact—just his family circle who squatted with him in his cave. A small and limited power of conversation was needed for this small society. But in contrast to this, think of our present-day society. Each of us has a store of knowledge at our command, a series of complicated philosophies, and a formidably enormous group of people with whom we have to come in contact. And so conversation has become an important part of our equipment, a vital element in our education. In civilized countries, even the remote villager has many different types of people with whom he must enter into conversation—the village doctor, the postman, the parish priest, and a score of friends, to mention only a few. But the more educated man or the city dweller has this list multiplied. How

necessary it is then for us to be able to convey our thoughts adequately through our conversation. We find ourselves having to explain our illnesses to the doctor, our daily needs to the tradesman, our problems to professional advisers, and our work to our employers. And last but not least, we have to enter into that varied conversation which makes us acceptable to a circle of friends and acquaintances.

With the realisation then, of what is required of us in the way of conversation, we should not consider its value lightly, for obviously conversation is the most important channel of communication for conveying ideas from one to another. Writing is of course a very important medium, but all of us are not authors and even if we were, we should most likely still convey most of our ideas through speech. Because then, of the importance of conversation, it is reasonable that it should be considered one of the most important of the cultural arts. We can consider it a science too, for it has a systematic and definite set of rules which has to be learnt if we are to become good conversationalists. At the same time we should realise that it is easily available to all of us if we have a normal amount of patience, concentration, and observation. Often we take the art of conversation for granted, treating it as something we have naturally acquired, or have acquired through our environment or through contact with cultured acquaintances. We imagine that it needs no formal practice or training. Here we must not confuse conversation with speech. To some people good speech is a natural acquisition. But a person may be able

to speak beautifully and yet be a very poor conversationalist. It is a misconception to underestimate the need for formal training in conversation, or if not formal training then some studied attention to its requirements. We often realise our own lack of proficiency in conversation, only when we come in contact with a mind superior to our own, or a conversationalist who has sought to make an art of his conversation. If we pay no attention to this art, unless we happen to be a naturally gifted conversationalist —which is rare—we usually find ourselves nervous in company, and afraid to express an opinion, until we are socially unacceptable and professionally uninspiring. We draw into our shells and become mentally and socially isolated from our fellows. Our world becomes smaller and poorer. Even in our intimate family circle, we are misunderstood because we cannot express in words the feelings we would like to. So this lack of ability to converse leads our friends to regard us as boring, our professional associates to consider us mentally inert, and our family circle to think of us as cold and unfeeling.

Let us now consider conversation from five different points of view—conversation in business or professional life, on social occasions, among friends, in intellectual circles, and in the common round in everyday life.

First of all, we will consider conversation in business and professional life. Here, to be unable to make appropriate conversation is an inestimable handicap. Take the example of an interview between a prospective em-

ployer and a prospective employee. The employer usually has a host of qualified men to choose from, for he states precisely in his advertisement what qualifications applicants are expected to have. Naturally only those with the necessary qualifications apply, unless of course an optimistic yet rather foolish person, unqualified, makes an application which will obviously find its way quickly into the waste-paper-basket. With so many applicants with similar qualifications, the personality of the candidate will be the deciding factor in his success, and when the employer has only a few minutes at his disposal in which to sum up the personality of a person completely unknown to him, yet one who has to enter into the close relationship of an employee, then the personality of the applicant as revealed by his conversation will be of decisive significance. How many times has a well-qualified person lost the chance of good appointment, because of his inability to make a good impression in his conversation during an interview. The simplicity of his conversation, its sincerity and intelligence, will be the cause of his success; the lack of them, the cause of his failure. How important it is then, that the prospective employee should be well equipped in the art of conversation His ability in this respect may be the turning point in his career.

Then, too, for the salesman, the ability to talk well is a vital factor, and many commercial houses which depend for much of their success on the power of the persuasive talk of their salesman, have recognised the importance of their staff being instructed in the art of sales talk. Such instruction forms part of the curriculum in courses

specially prepared for the salesman. Such courses will probably become more popular and widely used when statistics are able to prove their positive value. Any salesman worthy of the name can describe his goods, their intrinsic value and usefulness, but only the successful talker can persuade people to buy them. Affability, sincerity, and the golden rule that the customer is always right, and one should therefore never argue with him, are the qualities every salesman should bear in mind. All business men need to understand the art of talking if they are to inspire confidence into their business associates.

The same can be said of professional people. We often notice that it is not always the highest qualified person who gets to the top of his profession. Of course initiative plays a great part in all successful enterprise, but at the same time the power of persuasion and the power of inspiring confidence in one's professional associates, is of the greatest help. Both these qualities depend on one's conversational abilities. The hesitating, confused and diffident talker is certainly at a disadvantage. How often have the professional services of a man been dispensed with because his talk has not inspired confidence. The inexplicitness of a teacher, the diffidence of a doctor, the confusion of a lawyer, and the volubility of a secretary have often been responsible for his mediocre or unsuccessful career.

On the other hand, the man who has paid attention to the art of conversation, has overcome a major difficulty

in his business and professional life, and starts out with a valuable asset. He is well eqiupped to meet his varied clientele and to deal with delicate and difficult situations which arise in every kind of work. In his conversation will be tact, sincerity and dignity, humour when the occasion demands it, seriousness and alertness. His words will inspire confidence, and the hesitating will heed his advice. He has every chance of success for his power of communicating his ideas has been gained through study and the observation of others. And the observation of others is a very important factor in the success of our conversation. To gain experience of others, we must study them carefully— their interests and weaknesses, their aims and desires, their likes and dislikes. Some may like to call this having a knowledge of human psychology. Whatever we may call it, it is the same thing as studying the type of person we are dealing with. Some people may come in contact with countless persons and never understand them. Others may get to understand them a few minutes after meeting. One's quickness or slowness in getting to know a person is related to one's power of observation and concentration. The man who is all the time absorbed with his own self, thinking what he is going to say next, what the other man is thinking of him, what impression he is making, will be too much taken up by his own egocentric musings to study his acquaintances. In such cases, the speaker will unconsciously suit his conversation to himself rather than to his listener. That is not the way to be successful. Another thing—we must realise the importance of individuality, how each person with whom we come in contact will react differently to what we say. For example,

a wise teacher will adopt a different method of approach to a genius than to a mentally defective, and a doctor will give a more comprehensive explanation to an intelligent than to an ignorant patient. These may be considered extreme cases, but they serve to show that the approach to each individual must needs be different. But normally one has not to deal with such divergencies. One ordinary person is only a little different from every other ordinary person, and it is that fine shade of difference which one has to recognise and study if one is to approach a person in the right way. So strive to know the person you are talking to. You need to give more confidence to the timid, more explanation to the confused, more hope to the diffident. The tendency of many people is to treat all those with whom they come in contact in the same way, or to divide them into general grades, such as rich and poor, cultured and uncultured, scholarly and ignorant. Must we apply this fad of individuality even to common talk, they ask. Yes, we must, if our conversation is to be of any use. Thinking people who have studied this individual approach maintain that there is a positive correlation between such treatment and success. The power of conversation is therefore making itself felt. The employment of oral and psychological tests as substitutes for the usual written examination in the method of selecting candidates for certain appointments, and interviews so that qualities peculair to oral abilities can be estimated, go to show the recognition which is being given to conversation as a method for determining business or professional suitability. The tendency to employ oral rather than writt tests under such circumstances, makes it conceivable th

individual psychology as approached through conversation will take a more prominent part in business or professional training in the future.

In social life conversation is a most important asset. The man who is halting and silent in company is labelled sooner or later a bore, his presence is not sought after, and he becomes a social failure. Had he cultivated the habit of good conversation his whole attitude to social occasions would change. Man, we are told, is a gregarious animal, and it is therefore normal that he should seek the company of others. If he doesn't, it is usually because he has failed to adjust himself to society. If he were a social success, he would have a confident attitude to social life. He cannot but feel his failure when he is able to contribute nothing to the general flow of conversation. This thought naturally reacts to make him feel inferior to those with whom he comes in contact. Social isolation sets in and then begins that downward trend in his life which could have been so easily avoided if a little attention had been paid to his way of talking. He naturally avoids company, and enters upon a solitary and to some extent frustrated existence.

Contrast him with the graceful talker. There is no doubt that he is welcomed at social functions, for he is always a standby for hosts and hostesses. His presence gives them confidence that there will be no awkward gaps in the conversation, no tactless remarks that will embarrass their guests. He is able to attract merited attention. He can communicate his thoughts to others, and

receive theirs in exchange. He has realised that conversation is a give and take process. Through such conversation, a life of enrichment begins, a life made fuller and richer through free communication with one's fellows. What stimulation there is in such successful talk! How easy friendship becomes. Surely this person who has mastered the path to social success through his conversation, is on the road to general success. When in another chapter, we shall study the qualities which go to make up good conversation, we shall realise that they are just those same qualities which go to make life as a whole happy and successful. But all those who have become good conversationalists have not achieved their success in the same way. Some have studied the rules of good conversation as set down in books on the subject, some through reading great literature, some through being in the company of cultured people, gleaning conversational rules from them. But all of them have been conscious of the importance of good conversation. Unless we are conscious of the necessity of good conversation, our conversation will be indifferent and will lack improvement. Let us realise that good conversation is an admission card to the society of the cultured, that is of those people who have made or can make some contribution, however small, to human thought or progress.

The degree of the excellence of our own conversation is in positive correlation to the extent to which we are appreciated socially. It is, besides, indicative of our intelligence, our adaptability and our sense of social duty. For it is our duty to share our ideas with others, if of course

they are worth sharing. If they aren't we shoud set about to make them so. When we try to estimate the success of our conversation we should judge it by the value it has had for the company. Therein we show our social sense. We should be quick to realise whether the company wants light or serious conversation, quiet or merry, for it is not only the subject matter of our conversation which counts, but the suitability of the subject matter to the occasion. And we should not be dishonest with ourselves, and persuade ourselves that our conversation is good because it was received with acclamation on a certain occasion, but we should estimate the standard of that conversation, and know whether ours was good only because all the rest was so bad. A good test for our own standards is to take a good novel or play as the criterion. Most well-known plays can be studied with advantage for conversational purposes. But however we approach the subject of social conversation we should think of it in terms of social duty rather than personal popularity.

No less important is that conversation which is carried on among friends, relations and intimate family members. We are often apt to neglect this kind of conversation, and to underestimate its importance, for it has not the obvious value which business and social conversation has. If we choose to think about it we can make this conversation the means of the most enriching experiences; if we fail to give our attention to it, it can make a great part of our time valueless. It is the conversation of our family meal-times, our evenings at home, our visits to friends. It can afford ample opportunity of broadening our minds,

since on account of the intimate relationship of those concerned in it, we can freely discuss those subjects which might be difficult to bring up before strangers. The difficult subject of religion, the analysis of personal problems and experiences, and the talk of one's interests can provide tremendous scope for mental enrichment, and will admit of franker discussion and easier solution among friends, because their sympathy and understanding is more spontaneous and reassuring than that of those little known to us. A sympathetic interpretation of our thoughts and feelings, however ill-formed they may be, or however eccentric or fantastic, will often give us a truer perspective of our ideas and a clearer sense of their value; this is invaluable to us in general conversation The value of this conversation can be seen in the part parents of great people have played in the training of that greatness. For much of that training is inculcated through conversation and discussion in the intimacy of the family circle.

The fourth type of conversation we shall consider is purely intellectual or technical. This is of the greatest value for mental development, for it offers intellectual exercise of a high order. For this, knowledge and a logical mind are needed. Our knowledge should include specialised knowledge of one subject or more, and an amount of general knowledge. Its academic nature prevents its having the glamour or attraction of light social conversation, yet if one is incapable of joining in such conversation, one is debarred from intellectual society, and consequently of a great source of mental refreshment and progress. Perhaps of all kinds of conversation, it is the most generous,

for one gives readily of knowledge and ideas which may take one's greatest efforts to attain. Such dissemination of ideas is a worthy gift to offer one's fellows.

And then there comes another type of conversation the value of which is seen in our everyday relations with those around us. This is usually short crisp conversation, a word or two to a tradesman, a "good-morning" to a neighbour, a chat with a fellow traveller, a few words of welcome to a visitor. This is colloquial talking but just as important as more formal types, and has an etiquette and colour of its own. It constitutes one of the little delights of life, creates an atmosphere of neighbourliness, and helps us to establish friendly relationships between ourselves and those with whom we come in casual contact. Such conversation calls for the consideration of a few rules—kindliness and courtesy is usually what is most required of it. John Watson says, "Much of the sorrow of life springs from the accumulation, day by day, and year by year, of little trials—a letter written in less than courteous terms, a wrangle at the break-fast table, the rudeness of an acquaintance on the way to the city, an unfriendly act on the part of another, a cruel criticism needlessly reported by some meddler, a social slight by one of your circle, a controversy too hotly conducted. The trials within this class are innumerable, and consider not one of them is inevitable, not one of them but might have been spared if we or our brother man had had a grain of kindliness. Our social insolences, our irritating manner, our censorious judgment, our venomous letters, our pin-pricks in conversation, are all forms of deliberate unkindness and are all evidences of

an ill-conditioned nature." In the same way, it is the casual little things we say which can easily bring pleasure or sorrow.

So this chatty, informal type of talk, the major part of the conversation of the housewife, an integral part of everyone's conversation, has an essential value in establishing affability or enmity between ourselves and our casual acquaintances. It does not call for the precision of the business talk, nor the quick-wittedness of the social talk, but it does call for amiability and tact which all of us can acquire by a very small degree of consideration and unselfishness. Bad temper, sullenness and discontent must be set aside if we are to make this part of everyday talk a means of creating harmony with those around us. "The touchy and sensitive temper which takes offence at a word, the irritable temper which finds offence in everything, whether intended or not, the violent temper which wears a cloud on the face all day and never utters a word of complaint, the discontended temper brooding over its own wrongs, the severe temper which always looks at the worst side of whatever is done, the wilful temper which overrides every scruple to gratify a whim—what amount of pain have these caused in the hearts of men, if we could but sum up their results," says Bishop Temple.

Summing up, therefore, we come to the coñclusion that the value of conversation lies in its power of establishing links—business, professional, social, intellectual or friendly. It is the chief method through which one mind confers with another. It creates harmony or discord,

which has both a business and social value, and which helps us to give our richest thoughts to others and receive theirs in exchange. It is essentially an altruistic process. "It is a mutual meeting of minds," says one writer, "not a monologue but a reciprocal exchange of ideas." And every mind, even that of the seemingly ignorant, is able to add something to the mind of a receptive person. The mind of the wise man does not always suffer when it comes in contact with that of the less knowledgeable. A pleasing little story in illustration of this tells of a Scottish nobleman who was one morning walking across his estates with his shepherd. The nobleman noticed that the sheep were all clustered on the shady side of the hills. "Now if I were a sheep," said he, "I would get on the sunny side." "Gin ye waur a sheep, my laird," replied the shepherd, "ye wud hae mair sense," for he knew that the heavy-fleeced sheep would find sunshine more oppressive than man would. This story serves to show that the apparently ignorant are capable of illuminating thoughts, even if the expression of such thoughts is somewhat crude.

On the value of conversation, Emerson wrote, "It is very certain that sincere and happy conversation doubles our powers, that in the effort to unfold our thought to a friend, we make it clearer to ourselves, and surround it with illustrations that help and delight us. It may happen that each hears from the other a better wisdom than anyone else will ever hear from either. Speech is power; speech is to persuade, to convert, to compel. It is to bring another out of his bad sense into your good sense. You are to be a missionary, a carrier of all that is good and

noble." So we can judge the value of our conversation by its influence on others.

Let us sum up in the words of Stevenson: "The first duty of man is to speak; that is his chief business in this world; and talk, which is more harmonious speech of two or more, is by far the most accessible of pleasure. It costs nothing; it is all profit; it completes our education; it founds and fosters our friendships and it is by talk alone that we learn our period and ourselves."

## CHAPTER II

## *THE PRINCIPLES OF CONVERSATION*

In the art of conversation, as in all other arts, there are principles to be learnt. They are the fundamental technicalities of conversation, so to speak. In enumerating them, we shall take for granted the mastery of correctness of speech and a sufficiency of subject matter. Speech and subject matter are the instruments of conversation, not the principles. And just as one would not, in giving advice to a pianist, dwell on the necessity of his having a piano and pieces of music at his disposal, so we shall not here dwell on the need for mastery of speech and subject matter.

The recognition of conversational principles, makes our conversation of considerable strength and value, so it is worth while to study them closely. The list given here is general. Some readers may like to make a more comprehensive classification and sub-divide each heading into minor ones, others may like to put more emphasis on one principle than on another. This individuality in approach is to be encouraged for it will be the means of giving style and personality to one's ideas on conversation.

Briefly, the qualities necessary for good conversation are:— clarity, brevity, simplicity, courtesy, tact, sincerity, originality and pleasantness of tone.

*CLARITY*

Clearness in speech is obviousy essential if our conversation is to be at all useful. We have a certain idea to convey and it is necessary to convey it to others in such a way that they can get an exact meaning of what that idea is. Many people have excellent ideas but they fail to influence others because of their confused or vague expression. The necessity for clarity in business or professional conversation can be clearly recognised. Here we cannot afford to be inexplicit, for it might reasonably result in a financial or business loss to us. But the need for clarity in social or ordinary conversation is not so forcibly brought home to us.

The first essential for clarity in conversation is clarity of thought. If our thoughts are confused, we shall render them in speech in a confused way. A lawyer and a scientist, for example, require a very precise manner of expression. They must express themselves with almost mathematical precision. Each of their words is weighty with meaning, and must be chosen skilfully. All of us need to aim at such precision in our speech, but unfortunately modern conversation tends to accept a slack approach, and we are content to overdo a few stock words and phrases presuming that our listener will supplement in his own mind our lazily expressed ideas. "What a good book," "Such a nice person," are vague meaningless summaries which convey an idea so indefinite as to be useless. Yet how often do we use them, and how much of the conversation which we hear is equally indefinite. The English language is a very rich one, and we can adequately ex-

press the finest distinctions and the most difficult ideas if we choose to.

Lack of clarity is seen too, in the all too prevalent habit of not finishing a sentence, leaving it to the listener to finish it himself mentally. This again is the fault of lazy thinking. The constant analysis of our thoughts and the mental expression of them is imperative if we want to achieve clarity. Analysing passages from books, paraphrasing, and close study of historical and scientific writing will help us to avoid this indefiniteness of thought.

Sometimes we find our expression confused through our own lack of mastery of the language. To overcome this, we should practise talking in very simple sentences. This will give us confidence, until, good reading and listening to competent conversationalists, improve our vocabulary and make our conversation a more comprehensive medium of expression.

A more justifiable reason for lack of clarity is found when we try to simplify our thoughts. A professor is often guilty of confused explanation when he tries to present to less developed minds the profundity of his own ideas. Again people who are talking to others to whom the language is foreign find themselves hesitant and halting because of the difficulty of conveying ideas through a medium of expression difficult for their listeners to follow. They do not know through what analogies it is best to approach their listeners, nor what vocabulary is appropriate,

and in their effort to find a suitable way of expressing themselves, the coherence of their thought is lost.

A clear speaker is able to achieve a sense of harmony with his listeners, inspire confidence with his logical sequence of thought and command attention through the precision of its presentation.

*BREVITY*

To be brief in conversation is a sign of accuracy of thought, and modesty. The accurate thinker who has his thoughts at his finger-tips so to speak, will convey them in as short a way as he can, enlarging on them only for further clarity or emphasis. The unassuming person will speak briefly to avoid being the cynosure of all eyes. Naturally, every subject cannot be dispensed with in a few words, but one can say economically what there is to be said. An editor has to eliminate much written matter in journalistic articles, so that what the reader gets is a clear, comprehensive yet concise piece of writing. It would be well for the talkative speaker to edit his conversation mentally before he begins to speak so that his audiences can get more value for their listening. The talkative speaker is usually thought to be a boasting or conceited person who through the excess of his speech causes attention to be focused on him. His stories are long-drawn out, his jokes have lost their crispness, and he neither impresses a business associate whose time he has wasted, nor please his social acquaintances whom he has refused an equal share in the conversation. He dwells on trifles and details, and seldom in his earnestness to

monopolise the conversation does he see the faces of his listeners becoming irritable and bored. His opinions and accuracy are often doubted for the truthful speaker is usually known for his brevity. So it is well for us to remember that our honesty may be called in question if we forget the simple rule of brevity.

*SIMPLICITY*

Simplicity is the essence of all great art. How simple yet beautiful are the Greek statues. Simplicity of speech can be beautiful too. The Bible is famous as a piece of literature because of the simplicity of its language. "Consider the lilies of the field how they grow; they toil not neither do they spin, yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." And what could be more simple, yet more beautiful and penetrating than Keats' lines:

"A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.
Its loveliness increases; it shall never
Pass into nothingness, but still keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet
breathing."

It is not necessary nor is it an attribute of culture, as many think, to pepper our conversation with long words, classical phraseology and complicated constructions. It is on normal occasions, vulgar to do so, though when the conversation is purely intellectual or technical more elaborate and scholarly language is permissible. Sheridan has made generations laugh at the inimitable Mrs. Malaprop who became the laughing-stock of all her

acquaintances because of her long words "so ingeniously misapplied." Some people are prone to use complicated language in a company which they know will not understand it, for they feel that by this means they can stamp themselves as "cultured" or superior. This is of course despicable and a characteristic of lack of culture and good breeding. Pedantry is not the mark of a scholar.

On the other hand, many well-intentioned people use words which are "above the heads of their listeners," because they cannot gauge the standard of expression of their audience. In this connection is an apt little story of a clergyman who was rebuffed by one of his friends for using difficult language in his sermons. "For example," said the friend, "you spoke of 'felicity' when you should have said 'happiness'." "Everybody knows what 'felicity' means," rejoined the clergyman. "Very well," replied his friend, "we will try it on the first man we meet." Soon they met a farmer. "Can you tell me, my good friend, what 'felicity' is?" asked the clergyman. "Well," replied the farmer thoughtfully, "I know its something inside of a pig, but I can't say exactly what." There is no doubt that the clergyman wished honestly to convey certain thoughts to his congregation, but failed to do so, not through pedantry but through his inability to realise that his hearers' vocabulary was simpler than his own. "Be simple, unaffected; be honest in your speaking and writing. Never use a long word when a short one will do. . . . where a short word will do, you always lose by using a long one. You lose in clearness, you lose in honest expression of your meaning; and in the estimation of all men

who are competent to judge, you lose in reputation for ability."

—*Bryant.*

*COURTESY*

"Of courtesy it is much less
Than courage of heart and holiness.
Yet in my walks, it seems to me,
That the grace of God is in courtesy."

—*Alice Meynell.*

Courtesy in speech, as in general demeanour, can be easily recognised. One of the present day tendencies in conversation seems to be towards bluntness, which is often confused with frankness. Bluntness is often a negation of courtesy. One should of course say what one thinks and not what he feels the other person would like him to say, but at the same time he should say it courteously. The quiet, reasoned, well-chosen words of the sincere talker make for a pleasant relationship between himself and others. The agreeable atmosphere thus created is something to be sought after in conversational circles and only the disgruntled or embittered or intellectually snobbish would want to substitute the argumentative embarrassment caused by less courteous people. Not that courtesy forbids argument—it does not, but it encourages argument which seeks to enlighten, rather than that kind of argument which seeks to be boastful and petty. The speaker who in the drawing-room, by his tenacious arguing treats his listeners as if they were far beneath his standard of mental attainment, or speaks as if he were addressing a mob, lacks even the common politeness of ordinary society.

So, too, do those who fail to realise that their familiarity with a person does not absolve them from the usual courtesies of speech.

The energetically gesticulating speaker is also devoid of courtesy. Timely, unobstrusive gestures often add colour to a conversation, but the speaker who as he speaks seems to be conducting a symphony orchestra is tiresome to watch, and gives the impression that his listeners are incapable of understanding his speech without the accompaniment of certain peculiar movements. To adopt particular attitudes or mannerisms, too, is not a mark of courtesy. Cowper has very caustic remarks to make about such talkers:—

"And first take notice of those buffoons in Society, the Attitudinarians and Face-makers. These accompany every word with a peculiar grimace or gesture. They assent with a shrug, and contradict with a twisting of the neck; are angry by awry mouth, and pleased in a caper or minute step. They may be considered as speaking harlequins; and their rules of eloquence are taken from the Posture-master. These should be condemned to converse only in dumb show with their own persons, in the looking-glass, as well as the Smirkers and Smilers who so prettily let off their faces, together with their words, by a je-ne-sais-quoi between a grin and a dimple. With these we may likewise rank the affected tribes of Mimics who are constantly taking off the peculiar tone of voice or gesture of their acquaintances, though they do such wretched imitations, that (like bad painters) they are frequently forced to write their name under the picture before we can discover the likeness."

This is what a writer says of courteous speech:—

"How sweet and gracious even in common speech,
Is that fine sense which men call Courtesy!
Wholesome as air and genial as the light,
Welcome in every clime as breath of flowers."

*TACT*

Mahaffy calls tact, "a combination of intellectual quickness with lively sympathy." Tact is very necessary if conversation is to be agreeable and friendly. We often find ourselves in embarrassing situations in conversation. The unfortunate topic we have opened which applies so fittingly to a member of the party, the hot-headed conversation of one whose opinions so greatly differ from those of his listeners, the painful subject which recalls to someone a bitter personal catastrophe—these are situations which require the assistance of tact. We should be quick to ascertain the feelings of the injured one, the hurt expression, or the uncomfortable glance, and to repair it as appropriately as we can at the moment. A tactful, not a blatant change of subject, a quick disregard of the importance of the incident, will usually remedy the fault. But an open apology in front of all will add fat to the fire; a private apology later if it is judged suitable, might make amends.

At the same time, in our own conversation we should be able to judge readily what is suitable and agreeable for the company and to be careful to avoid, in the presence of strangers, controversial subjects or personal

matters. We thereby avoid "those small inconveniences which damage society so vastly out of proportion to their intrinsic importance." Conversation indicating personal prejudice, racial distinctions or religious convictions should be avoided in the company of strangers.

*SINCERITY*

One perhaps imagines that with all that has been said about courtesy and tact, there is no room left for sincerity in conversation. But that is not so. Sincerity implies candour and frankness and we should not sacrifice these qualities to politeness. Yet if one finds oneself in an argument in which parties hold conflicting views, one must say what one frankly thinks, yet say it with dignity and politeness. Among people of intellect and reason, no sincere opinion is worthless, and it should never be necessary for us to put forward an opinion which is not our own, merely to impress those around us. This insincerity is only appreciated by small-minded people, those who feel their own reputation is enhanced if they hear their friends voicing high-sounding opinions. Seldom is an audience deceived by such an insincere speaker. Let us be able to say,

"You know I say
Just what I think, and nothing more or less,
And when I pray, my heart is in my prayer."

But sometimes insincerity may result from shyness or from a feeling of inferiority. To compensate for this, one advances ideas which are not one's own, or adopts an attitude of affectation, or what is worst, states positive un-

truths. While all sympathy is due to the shy and nervous, yet such conversation is judged as worthless by right-minded people, and a person adopting it will soon find that he is socially boycotted, unless his society is that of pseudo-intellectuals or the half-educated. We should never be ashamed of our opinions if they are honest and considered convictions. If on the other hand, they are trivial it is best to keep them to ourselves. Then again, we should not voice flippant or high-sounding opinions and justify them on the grounds of their being a frank expression of our views, when they are merely a suggestion of a tendency in us to wish to appear "modern."

### *ORIGINALITY*

One of the most difficult qualities to achieve in conversation is originality. To acquire an original conversational style requires, for most of us, intensive thought and practice and a power of imagination. To achieve it, we need to be often in the company of cultured speakers, to have studied the art of speaking, and to be acquainted with good literature. Many of us are content to express our ideas very ordinarily, even on occasions and with subjects which offer great scope for original presentation. The ordinary conversation of the household or the casual conversation on our daily travels gives little occasion for originality, and to introduce it as such times would be pedantic. One would be rightly considered eccentric if one showed geographical scholarship about the weather in a passing conversation with a neighbour, or a chat in the bus. No, this is not the way to achieve originality. Originality belongs rather to more comprehensive conversation or dis-

cussion, not to the trivialities of casual talk. A prerequisite of originality of expression is originality of thought. We must have thought about a subject before we can submit it to original treatment. We must bring to life new ideas on the subject, and for that we need knowledge. Many subjects are dull, only because we think we know all about them, having heard the same ideas expressed in connection with them, over and over again. If we think we know all about a particular subject, it is a sure sign that we have not explored it sufficiently. Knowledge is dynamic, not static. We should see endless possibilities in subjects and ideas, just like the scientist who when he has come to the end of a piece of research, uses his results as a starting off point for another scientific adventure. Or as the poet who

> "As imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them into shapes, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name."

A well chosen adjective, an apt quotation, a vivid simile are devices which can be used successfully to introduce originality of expression. Even the most ordinary idea takes on an attractive form under this new style of presentation.

## *PLEASANTNESS OF TONE*

One can best realise the value of a pleasant tone of voice when one recalls the lessons of his teachers or the lectures of his professors. How tiring and depressing is the monotonous tone of a speaker; like the unvarying

downs and plateaus, it never thrills, never inspires. No good speaker speaks monotonously. The "driest" subject can be interesting if the speaker's tone is modulated with emphasis and fluctuations of the voice. A voice, full of life, is always engaging and draws the attention of listeners, and one is often attracted to it even if the substance of the speech is somewhat thin.

To achieve pleasantness of tone, does not necessarily imply a continued smile; a fixed smile in fact would detract from that achievement, since it would hamper the movement of the lips, so necessary for the varying of the voice. But one must have flexibility of tone, and complete control over the voice. Gasping for breath, talking between the teeth, swallowing words, talking through the nose, and muttering. will never produce a pleasing effect. To produce that richness which a pleasing tone implies, there must be some emotion in the voice. Beecher says, "How much squandering there is of the voice! How seldom does a man dare acquit himself with pathos and fervour. A man may be a master before an instrument; only the instrument is dead; and he has the living hand; and out of that dead instrument what wonderous harmony springs forth at his touch." To achieve musical speech, inflected and modulated, never too loud, never too soft, is an art in itself.

In summing up let us remember the advice of Cicero. "To acquire self-confidence and to win the confidence of your audience, it is necessary to develop a soft voice, a modest countenance and a simple manner of speaking.

This method is especially valuable in those speeches in which one is trying to influence a fair-minded judge. Energetic oratory is not always desirable: more favour is to be gained by a gentle demeanour, a soft voice and a simple style."

And a great psychologist has said, "There are three stages in our mental development; the first stage when we are simple through ignorance; the second stage when we become complex through the process of learning; and the third stage when we become simple again through knowledge."

## CHAPTER III

## *SUBJECT MATTER*

When one considers the inexhaustible range of matter there is to talk about, one is amazed that anyone should complain that he finds himself in the midst of people with whom he can find nothing to say. Yet this is often the case. Why is it so? It is often because that person hasn't the right kind of matter with which to interest his listeners, or his listeners are not familiar with the kind of knowledge he is interested in. To overcome such a position, we must have a store of varied knowledge at our disposal, suitable for all kinds of occasions and for all kinds of people, and secondly, we must judge what kind of matter is suitable for the occasion, or to the people with whom we find ourselves having to converse. And then we must present it in such a way that it is bound to arrest attention.

### *WHAT TO TALK ABOUT*

Firstly, we shall discuss what types of subject matter are necessary to form an average basis for most situations in which we are called upon to make conversation. Consider at the outset what different types of people we meet in our normal life, then on the more rare occasions; think what a diversity of interests they have and then think of the wide range of matter accessible to them. Obviously we come to the conclusion that in modern times when

there are such tremendous facilities for conveying knowledge the person who has not a representative and comprehensive cross-section of such knowledge will be greatly handicapped in conversational matters. His conversation will be vapid and dull, and his reaction to the conversation of others unintelligent. And as social, racial and religious barriers are broken down, and as we achieve true intellectual freedom, we shall find the need for an even greater comprehensiveness in conversation if we are to take a full part in communicating our ideas to others, and receiving theirs in exchange.

What is to be included in this vast range of subject matter? A brief, general classification might be this—topical, technical, intellectual, and "social"—the last being a qualification which needs some explanation but which has been adopted only for the sake of convenience. Each of these headings may be subdivided, almost indefinitely, but space does not permit of a more precise classification here.

*Topical Matter* is that which we glean from current literature, entertainments, meetings, discussions, etc., dealing with current events. The reading of newspapers and magazines should provide us with much of our material for this category. But our reading of such literature should be comprehensive, not thin and sketchy. We should of course know about contemporary problems, political events, great men and women, social, scientific and sporting news, but it is not enough merely to have a knowledge of all these things; we should go deeper, and should be able to discuss them with reference to their historical significance. It is much more useful to see an event in its histo-

rical perspective rather than in isolation. For example, to know that so and so created a world record for flying, is not nearly so complete, and therefore not so useful a piece of information, as knowing what that record is, and what the previous record was, and by whom, when and where it was set up. We should habituate ourselves to completing little bits of knowledge in this way, remembering that all events have some history or a historical aspect. Again, present day conversation has reached such a high standard among educated people that merely to be conversant with modern reading, entertainment, operas, plays, ballets, musical concerts, etc., is not enough. We must know something about their background and the circumstances which inspired them and their composition. Knowing this, we can talk intelligently about different works of art—here we use "art" in its widest sense—and make suitable comparisons and constructive criticisms.

We can increase our topical knowledge tremendously by regularly subscribing to good magazines, and by joining different societies, going to discussion groups, and attending public meetings, etc. These usually give us a compact and ready-made idea of different problems, which is an added advantage since it engages less of our time.

Most people would consider it necessary, in modern society, to have a foreign language at one's command, or to know it sufficiently well to understand references, or common words and phrases of foreign origin which have been absorbed into the English language. To know a foreign language certainly repays all our trouble in learning

it, since it brings us in close contact with different minds and different mental attitudes.

With such knowledge at our disposal, we can confidently take part in conversation on formal or informal occasions when the interchange of ideas on present events is indicated. Without such knowledge, one is bound to be shy and awkward.

*Intellectual Matter.* We now come to intellectual matter. All matter is of course intellectual in so far as it proceeds from the intellect, but here we limit ourselves to that matter which is acquired by wide reading, deep study and intercourse with scholarly minds. We may briefly subdivide this category into (*a*) literary, (*b*) historical, (*c*) classical, (*d*) scientific, and (*e*) religious knowledge.

(*a*) Today so many amenities for the acquisition ot literary knowledge have been made available to all of us, that there is small excuse for our omitting to get access to it. Libraries provide us with all kinds of writing, without our entailing anything but a nominal expense; we see great pieces of literature, operas and ballets dramatised on the films; the theatre presents to us all the great plays, classical and contemporary; art galleries and exhibitions give us an opportunity of understanding the works of the greatest artists; and musical performances bring to us the compositions of famous composers. One can hardly call onself cultured if one has only a sketchy acquaintance with literature, art and music, for knowledge of these subjects

has been made so easily accessible to all, that a studied knowledge of them is now the common possession of the man in the street.

And here it would be relevant to say that it is not enough to be acquainted with the literature and arts of one's own country. We should have a *comparative* idea of them, that is, we should know about the literature and arts of other countries and so be able to compare them. All great literature is available in translations, and we should take advantage of this even although we may not consider a translation an adequate compensation for the original. As we become more international in outlook, such comparative knowledge will be indispensable.

(*b*) With the tremendous advance in scientific thought and processes during this century, an elementary knowledge of scientific investigation and achievement is necessary for the average man to be able to take an intelligent part in good conversation. For example, synthetic chemistry, atomic energy, Apline explorations and the development of radar should have some meaning for all of us. We should be ready to seek more information on them than a daily newspaper can give. Scientific and medical processes are being revealed with amazing rapidity, and are simplified and made intelligible to the layman through books, educational films, broadcasts, etc. It is indeed an ignorant person who can ignore such revelations, or who will never come across them in the course of his conversation.

(*c*) That historical matter is a prerequisite of culture can be seen from the part which it plays in every sphere of

our activity. Our newspapers and magazines are filled with it, plays and films deal often with historical personages and historical events in the shape of war and peace, and political issues mould our very existence. Obviously history cannot be neglected. But we must not concentrate on contemporary historical evens, in fact the significance of contemporary history is somewhat meaningless without relevance to the past. The relevance of the past, the urgency of the present and the probability of the future must be viewed together—this is history. The significance of one is lost without reference to the others. For example, to know the whole course of World War II is knowledge of little value; its value only increases when we look back to find its causes and look forward to anticipate its results.

(*d*) In Mediaeval Europe, a man was not considered educated unless he had had a classical education. The knowledge and use of one's own language was not so much of a cultural asset—one had to be skilled in Latin or Greek. These, together with Sanskrit, Pali, Classical Persian, Arabic, Chinese, etc., are the most widely known of the classical languages. Today, this tendency still exists, though the mediaeval insistence on it is fading. Some universities still require such knowledge as qualification for admission. But on the whole modern languages are replacing classical ones in school curricula, and many people consider this a more realistic and practical approach to modern requirements.

Yet much of the great literature of the world, however, is steeped in classical reference, and to be able to appreciate it fully we should have some acquaintance with

a classical language. Again our own culture is inextricably linked with classical philosophy and thought, and we should be able to realise our indebtedness to it, but that cannot be done fully unless we know the classical language concerned. How greatly Europe is indebted to Greek and Hebrew philosophy, and India to Vedic Philosophy. In fact our religious knowledge whether it is from the Greek and Hebrew, of the Bible, from the Sanskrit of the Vedas, or from the Pali of the Buddhist faith. It is not indispensable to know a classical language, yet it is a great asset in cultural circles.

(*e*) A comparative knowledge of religion is sought after by very few, yet how useful and instructive it is and how ably it helps us to have a sympathetic attitude towards other people's religious beliefs. Possibly because religion is a subject on which most people hold very strong views, and because often it is felt that it is a matter which should not be subjected to criticism or comparison, people do not care to draw it into the general course of conversation. It is held sacred and personal, and is discussed usually only in intimate circles or at times set apart for special discussion. It is often discussed in a less sympathetic way by those who wish to disparage religions other than their own. This is of course despicable.

But however we discuss it, it seems that our prejudices and misunderstandings, could be neutralized by a more studied knowledge of the chief religions of the world. It is amazing the number and kind of people who can discuss

other subjects so fluently and reasonably, but become illogical, vague and irritated when religion is under discussion.

A reasonable approach to a religious discussion supported by sound religious knowledge can go a long way to dispel those misunderstandings which arise when people of different religious viewpoints come together. All religions have been based on worthy principles, though the realisation of the simplicity and value of those principles has often been lost in the complicated ritual which has grown up around them. Therefore, a study of the basic principles of the great religions would be a good guide to those who think that only their own principles are worthy of acceptance.

*Technical Matter.* Technical references are now so commonly used that one finds oneself often unable to follow a simple conversation because of the technical terms employed. All branches of study make use of words which have a special meaning in application to that particular branch. These are called technical terms. So every branch of knowledge really has a small vocabulary of its own. To help us to understand such technical language there are on the market many technical dictionaries. We should avail ourselves of these and acquaint ourselves with the most widely used of such terms. For example, "impression" means one thing to the artist, another to the psychologist; and a "bar" in legal parlance is quite a different thing from the "bar" as a drinker understands it and again different from the "bar" as the musician thinks of it. It would be profitable if schools included the use of such

terms in general knowledge tests, for they make both our study and recreation much more easy to understand. How much interest is added to a cricket match if we understand all the technicalities involved; how ignorant we feel, if we do not know racing terms for example, or the language of the bridge table. When we hear the lawyer speak of the bench, the doctor of streptococci, the architect of elevations, and the psychologist of intelligence quotients how unread we feel when the puzzled look of ignorance appears on our faces.

Technical language is bound to be used in much of the conversation we have to take part in. If we do not understand it, it is best to ask the speaker for enlightenment. We should not feel embarrassed to do so for no layman can be expected to be familiar with all the technical terms employed in any particular subject. At the same time, we should get into the habit of looking up terms in a technical dictionary if we do not understand their implications or special use.

*Social Matter.* The use of the word "social" here requires some explanation. "Social" in this context is taken to include all that miscellaneous knowledge which is useful on social occasions when light and entertaining talk is needed. Little anecdotes, short crisp stories, witticisms, jokes, etc., form this class. These are always popular and add vitality and amusement to the casual or informal type of talk.

Naturally, this kind of talk must be apt, and not drag-

ged in at an unsuitable opportunity merely because the speaker wants to satisfy a whim or feels disposed to be funny. And inappropriate anecdote is worse than none at all. To be successful in relating such anecdotes etc., the telling of them must be very skilfully done. It requires a sense of humour, a sense of the dramatic and a expression is disastrous to a well-told story for the company is attuned to lightness and crispness. Brief, pithy stories are the most palatable, for listeners automatically give their whole attention to them. The pitch of concentration under light circumstances is difficult to maintain—it is much easier to fix one's attention on a serious subject say for an hour, than to concentrate on a more flippant type of talk for the same period. Very few people can listen to jokes for a whole hour, for there are few tangible ideas for the mind to fix itself on, and few connections to lead it from one idea to another.

Some people are gifted in story telling or telling jokes, and if one is only a poor hand at it one should not inflict one's efforts on a company. It is most embarrassing to listen to a joke told hesitantly, or the point of which is not made clear. The listeners laugh without enthusiasm, for the sake of politeness, but there is an obvious suggestion that the joke was weak or "hadn't gone down." It is in fact, a courageous undertaking to amuse a company and one should be confident of one's skill before setting out to do so.

*WHEN TO SAY IT*

Now we come to the second part, the suitability of our choice of matter to the occasion or to the people to

whom we are talking. We may have a quantity of knowledge to handle, but we must dispose of it at the proper time and in the proper place. It is just as laughable and incongruous to choose a subject unsuited to the occasion as to wear plus-fours at a dinner party. Many people are particular about the suitability of their clothes, but do not apply the same principles of choice to their conversation.

First, to decide on the suitability of matter we need to know something of the people with whom we have to converse. Have they the same degree of culture, a similar background, similar ideas and similar experiences as we have. If they have, the sort of conversation which interests us will interest them too. If they haven't we must take into account their dissimilarities or their idiosyncracies and their different standards, for nothing can be in worse taste than to inflict on another person conversation which has no meaning for his way of thinking. Naturally, with intimate friends such difficulties do not arise, yet even in very friendly talk, we must learn to recognise the kindness and suitability of small omissions, or courtesies of speech; and we should not carry friendly banter or argument too far.

It is an embarrassing moment when one finds one has offended a member of the company by touching upon a subject which is distasteful, or which marks a particular person off from the rest. To disparage a profession without learning if any member of the company belongs to it, to criticise the religious principles of a sect to which a member of the company belongs, to talk about "we" refer-

ring to a particular nation or group, when all the members of the company do not belong to that group—these are contemptible references and are avoided by the people of good taste. In order not to wound the susceptibilities of the person or persons involved, such references should be avoided altogether or introduced kindly and with explanation if necessary.

Into this category falls one of the most common faults in talking—recounting experiences which only one or two in the company can share, or telling a joke, the significance of which is not shared by all, or calling a person by a pet name which is not known to all, or making allusions which are meant to convey something more to one member of the company than to the others. If one has been guilty of such a breach of conversational etiquette he should explain his allusion immediately. "This is so and so's pet name," "My allusion was to a friend whom we both met while we were on holiday," or some such explanation which will express to the company the speaker's desire to share his thoughts with all present. Not to offer such illumination is to leave one or more members of the company embarrassed and depressed, and with a feeling of resentment against the speaker, and a poor opinion of his good breeding.

"To talk shop" in a general company is yet another unpardonable offence, unless explanation is offered, and accepted readily. If in a gathering there are two people in the same profession, they should avoid talking about their work, leaving the others to be bored and neglected.

To listen to the conversation which is not intelligible is most irritating. And in any case, one should check oneself of the narrow habit of gravitating towards someone of like tastes and sympathies. We are likely to be much better rewarded mentally, if we converse with someone who can throw on a subject, a light different from our own.

To overcome these faults, we should try to sum up our audience and judge what would be discreet and pleasing. Better to be silent than offensive in company. Some people have the habit of finding out what a person's profession is, and then talking to him about it. This is a mistake unless we at the same time find out whether the person wants to talk about his work outside working hours. It may be that it is the one subject he likes to talk about, a subject which stimulates and inspires him to talk, or on the other hand he may wish to leave his professional matters behind him when the day's work is over, and it may be a negation of relaxation for him if they are made the topic of a conversation.

We have been talking about those who introduce matter which is not of universal interest to all present. We now come to another type of speaker—the person who constantly keeps the conversation centred around himself—who talks of his adventures, his house, his experiences, the sayings of his baby, the accomplishments of his children and a manifold list of egocentric observations. It is for others to be interested in us in the normal course of the conversation, not for us to thrust ourselves upon the interest of others.

In conclusion, it is well to remember that our choice of subject matter and the suitability of its presentation shows our character, our degree of culture and the depth of our knowledge. Even in the shortest of conversations, we reveal these qualities to some extent. The greatest orators have been men of strong character and culture. Burke was one of the greatest orators the eighteenth century produced and Dr. Johnson once said of him, "Burke is such a man that if you met him for the first time in the street, where you were stopped by a drove of oxen, and you and he stepped aside to take shelter but for five minutes, he'd talk to you in such a manner, that when you parted, you'd say 'This is an extraordinary man.'" Conversation can be much more revealing than is often imagined.

## CHAPTER IV

### *FAULTS TO AVOID*

An essential aim of conversation is to give pleasure to those with whom we converse, pleasure not in the sense of being amusing but in creating an atmosphere of harmony and giving mental enrichment to our listeners. We know now what qualities are necessary for a good conversationalist and what subject matter we should have in our possession. Now we must enumerate the faults we should avoid if our conversation is to achieve the aim of giving pleasure.

Avoid an unpleasant attitude. However, irritated we might feel at the turn the conversation has taken, we should maintain the dignity of being pleasant. We might be forced to say something unpleasant; for example, it may be necessary to scold a servant, correct a child, or point out a mistake to a friend, yet if we approach the task with pleasant restraint, we shall accomplish our purpose more successfully, and show our own sense of refinement.

Avoid bad or affected pronunciation. Both are equally low-bred. We should attempt a good standard of speech, showing neither the characteristics of the half-educated nor those of the half-cultured. Affectation is usually the mark of a person with an inferiority complex, a way of

hiding inferior mental ability. Because one has to little worthy of contribution, one tries to embellish its presentation with an affected accent. Listen to good speakers—politicians, public figures, etc. One notices that their clear forceful speech is quite devoid of affectation. It is natural speech, because the speaker has so much worth saying that he cannot afford to let any point be lost in unnatural delivery. Affected speech is seldom forceful, for subconsciously the speaker's attention is fixed on the pronunciation to such a degree that the actual subject matter is put in the background. Good speech has a clarity, facility and purity of tone that is always pleasing. Bad pronunciation is a great handicap for it cannot have a universal appeal, and is often irritating and grating.

Avoid talking loudly. It has been said that Hitler always spoke as if he were addressing a public meeting. It is uncouth to talk so loudly that people for whom your conversation is not meant, can hear distinctly what you say. One is then lecturing not conversing. Cowper remarks of such people that they "enquire after your health like a town crier."

Avoid, on the other hand, talking in very soft tones. It is irritating for a listener to have to repeat constantly "pardon" or "I'm afraid I didn't hear." Soon he will give up the efforts of trying to hear.

Avoid whispering. It is contemptible to whisper aside to another person when others are in the company. This practice can never be condoned, and an apology or

explanation for it can never be considered a compensation. Your listeners are quite justified in accepting no allowance for such a breach of etiquette.

Avoid gesticulation while talking. Gesture and gesticulation may be very clever in a mimicking show, but they are distinctly bad taste in conversation. Those people who cannot express themselves adequately in words, often resort to gesticulating as a means of helping themselves out. We find that small children whose powers of expression are not yet well developed, often use this form of expression. It requires of one's listeners the double job of listening, and watching one's gymnastics. It is essentially an elementary medium of communication. There is no need to be an actor when one speaks. To be convincing one does not have to be theatrical.

Avoid mannerisms. They are usually the outcome of a nervous temperament, or a studied form of affectation. To fidget with one's fingers, bite one's nails, stand on one leg and then on the other with monotonous regularity, adjust one's tie, or tap the floor with one's heels are some of the annoying habits which one is often compelled to watch. We may include as well, facial expressions—the pouting lips, the fixed smile, the ugly grimace. There is the story of a speaker who had acquired the habit of fingering a coat button while he was addressing gatherings. Once his friends surreptitiously cut off the button, and the speaker not being able to resort to his usual mannerisms, lost the thread of his speech and could say nothing.

This shows how unconsciously mannerisms make slaves of our mental efficiency.

Avoid interruption. This shows very bad manners and a lack of appreciation of what is being said. However annoyed we may feel at the long-windedness of a speaker, we may never cut short what he has to say with an interruption. It may be a painful, yet it is a courteous thing to listen till the end. Again, the quick thinking person may feel a tendency to finish the sentence over which the slow talker is labouring. Yet this should be resisted. To interrupt with "Excuse me, before I forget, etc." or "Oh yes, I had the same kind of experience too," or some such expression, is a breach of good manners. It may be permissible to interrupt for further clarification of a point, which if left till the end of the speech might lose its significance. But even this should be done with discrimination.

Avoid inattention. To be inattentive is to confess a lack of concentration or the inability to understand what is being said, or lack of sympathy with the subject matter of the talk. We should give that whole-hearted attention to a piece of conversation, that we do to a play or opera. Equally bad is the habit of thinking one's own thoughts when one should be listening to another's. Of this habit, Swift says, "There are some people whose good manners will not suffer them to interrupt you, but what is almost as bad, will discover abundance of impatience, and be upon the watch until you have done, because they started something in their own thoughts which they long to be delivered of. Meantime, they are so far from re-

garding what passes that their imaginations are wholly turned upon what they have in reserve, for fear it should slip out of their memory." It is to be hoped that they will be one day checked by their own embarrassment when the speaker forgets his last observation and ask them to enlighten him.

Avoid slang and loose speech in formal conversation. It is often indulged in with vitality and force in friendly colloquial talk, but it is incongruous on formal occasions, when language which has a universal application should be used, for much slang is local, and meaningless for those not conversant with it. Similarly, expressions used normally in office routine should be avoided in social talk. For example, "I okayed this," "cut that out," "great guys," "kid," "bunk," "make it snappy," etc., are common slang expressions which should be used sparingly even in informal circumstances. Much slang has no definite origin, no logical basis of form, and is meaningless to those not acquainted with its significance. For example, one cannot guess the significance of such a slang expression, as "to kick the bucket." It has a special application which is certainly not founded upon logic. Such expressions may be pithy and to some minds appealing but they cannot be considered attributes of cultured speech. When a slang word or phrase is sufficiently expressive and catholic in application it is incorporated in the normal language of the nation and as such is included in the dictionary. Until then it is to be ranked among slang expressions.

Avoid correcting a speaker in company, unless you

know that he has deliberately erred on the side of inaccuracy. A person who insists on exactness often fails to realise that it often has little significance or relevance when seen in perspective. For example, "It happened in January 1854"—"Oh, I beg your pardon, may I add a correction—it was in December 1853." To the scholar or historian such precision may have the greatest significance, to the ordinary person very little. Only when exactness has some definite value for the point of the conversation should it be insisted upon and a correction deemed justifiable. And the way the correction is made is most important. It should not be blunt contradiction, but a constructive statement spoken with tact and courtesy.

Avoid useless criticism. Effective criticism should first be constructive, then destructive—if necessary. We should always be more ready to appreciate rather than disparage. Many people think of criticism as always being negative. This is a wrong idea. It is comparatively easy to say what should not be, much less easy to say what should be. Most things have something good in them and something bad, but often we are prone to see only the one or the other. Ill-considered, hasty criticism, is useless; so is vague criticism. "That picture is awfully good" means nothing that can be usefully incorporated in one's mental value of the picture. So too, 'that's a hideous building," "his speech was awful," etc. To be useful, a criticism must be carefully thought over, comprehensive in that it sees all qualities, and given in the right spirit —a spirit of helpfulness and appreciation.

"Vociferated logic kills me quite;
A noisy man is always in the right—
I twirl my thumbs, fall back into my chair,
Fix on the wainscoat a distressful stare;
And when I hope his blunders all are out,
Reply discreetly, 'To be sure—no doubt.'"

—Anon.

Avoid repetition. Once you have made a statement clearly, there is no need to repeat it. Yet we find speakers often do this, though the repetition may be in different words. Only the chatter-box has time to be redundant. The talker who wants to emphasise the cleverness of one of his observations is often guilty of repetition and so is he who feels himself mentally superior to those around him, whom he seems to think, cannot grasp the implication of his words the first time. There is so much each member of a group can usefully contribute that among good conversationalists repetition is an irritating waste of time.

Avoid monopolising the conversation. Remember that conversation is a give and take process, and as Cowper says, "We should try to keep up conversation like a ball bandied to and from one to the other rather than seize it all to ourselves and drive it before us like a football." Naturally if one has specialized knowledge of which the company is ignorant, but of which it wants to be informed, then he should be gracious enough to enlighten that company to the best and fullest of his knowledge. But unless

you are called upon for such a one-man show, be content to have only a share in the conversation.

Avoid prominence in conversing with others. Be content to remain one of the company rather than be all of it. This is rather different from monopolising the conversation, for that implies incessant talking. One may make himself prominent by saying little, but by announcing something sensational, by remaining disgruntled, by being affected, or by adopting ostentatious mannerisms. There are many other little ways by which a person can attract attention towards himself. Most of these are due to a subconscious inferiority which is trying to assert itself. On the other hand, and equally to be condemned, is the person who wishes to attract attention by an aloof silence, suggestive of a superior contempt for what is being said.

Avoid giving a personal opinion unless it is directly asked for, or indirectly suggested. To be continually saying, "I think this" or that, or something else, is to presume your personal opinions are very valuable, which unless you have special or particular knowledge in that instance, is probably not the case. Where we know our opinions to be worthy of serious consideration, we should give them fearlessly and generously but we should part with such personal opinions only when the occasion demands. Remember our likes and dislikes have much more meaning for us than they have for others.

Avoid giving advice unless it is sought, and then give it modestly and with a due sense or responsibility. To recommend a person or thing to someone is a grave res-

ponsibility. If your recommendation chances to meet with the disapproval of the person concerned, you will not only feel embarrassed, but your judgment might well be called in question and you may do positive harm to the person who accepts your advice. It is a common habit to recommend doctors, teachers, books, medicines, etc. It is well to remember that one man's meat is another man's poison. Give advice only when you are fully qualified to do so.

Avoid sensationalism. To express things sensationally is considered the attitude of a very ill-bred person. Dickens skilfully impresses on us the sensationalism of the ignorant coachman in "David Copperfield," who so energetically tells David of the dreadful happenings which the little boys at David's prospective school have experienced. The cultured persons expresses himself with subduedness and composure. To be hysterical or unduly excited in one's talk is to show a mind which is poorly disciplined. The cheaper type of newspaper or magazine with its blood-curdling headlines, and the majority of popular films, are largely responsible for the idea that sensationalism appeals to the popular imagination. It has a strong appeal to those who easily give credence to extravagant ideas. To have such an appreciation for the melodramatic indicates a small immature mind, and emotions which are shallow and perverted. True emotions are deeper and more difficult of expression, for they are embodiments of 'thoughts that do often lie too deep for words."

Avoid undue emphasis. As in writing, so in speech—if you have made your meaning clear there is no need for

underlining. There must be some emphasis in speech, but this is normally supplied by word accents, and phrasing. For example "I *know*—and am sure *you* do too—that this is the right thing to do." This is natural emphasis, which comes to us normally. But "I *do* hope you'll have an *awfully nice* time" or "It's *so nice* of you to come *all* this way to *see* us." This is suggestive of extravagance and insincerity. In lectures and public speaking, of course emphasis has a special value, but we cannot apply it similarly to ordinary conversation.

Avoid hasty positiveness. To err is human, and unless we are very sure of our ground, we should always consider ourselves open to correction. If we make assertions, we should be able to support them with facts and figures. If we can't we lay ourselves open to attacks upon our accuracy and truthfulness. It is embarrassing to hear it said of us, "You can't believe anything he says, he never has any evidence." A seemingly truthful statement may be quite incorrect in the light of modern knowledge and research. "I'm sure" and "It's certain" are often taken as prefacing a doubtful statement. On the other hand, the person who always says, "I don't know" or "I'm not sure," gives little weight to his statements. This makes us realise that our aim should be correct knowledge, which does away with the faults of both positiveness and vagueness.

Avoid extravagance in speech. Extravagant phrases and adjectives are vague and meaningless. To give an over-estimated idea or something is as bad as an under-

estimated idea. If an advertiser gives an extravagant picture of his goods, the consumer will soon learn not to place any value on his advertisements. In the same way we cannot expect value to be placed on our extravagances in speech. Exaggeration, boasting and talkativeness are included in this category. They are the qualities of a commercial traveller's conversation, not of a diplomat's.

Avoid being illogical. The inability to reason clearly, or tell a story according to the logical sequence of events or relate a series of historical incidents in their chronological order proceeds from a cloudy, muddled mind. A sense of logic is innate in all of us it seems, for it is surprising the logic which small children show when they repeat a story, going logically from the first event to the second and so on. Again small children ask very pertinent questions, and tenaciously hang on to them until satisfactory answers have been given. But the directness and order of the child mind is often lost as one gets older. To remedy this confused condition, one should simplify one's thoughts, reducing them to a simple form; analyse them and express them in a direct form, devoid of all extraneous matter or embellishments of style.

Avoid inaccuracy. If you have an assertion to make, see that it is accurate. One's character is permanently injured if one tells lies or dissembles. As Bacon says, "If you dissemble sometimes your knowledge of that you are thought to know, you shall be thought another time to know that you know not."

Avoid superficiality. Don't pretend you know what

you don't know. If you have only a veneer of learning, be wise enough not to display it. There are so many sources available for the acquisition of sound knowledge that only an ignorant person will be deceived by shallow learning. Another example of superficiality is shown in one's preference for dwelling on trivial matters rather than those which are really material to the point in question. Again, the habit of saying the obvious is another example of superficiality.

Avoid being personal. Our degree of intimacy with the person to whom we are speaking should dictate how far we are permitted to make personal remarks. Obviously, if we know the person well, we may seek personal advice, ask personal questions, or invite confidences and so forth. But to scatter our confidences far and wide is indiscreet and foolish. To invite advice from those we know only slightly is to admit that we have no firmer friend from whom to seek it. Only with people whose sincerity is assured and whom we can ask to shoulder the responsibility of being a confidant, should we enter into such close conversational intimacy.

Avoid being pedantic. If your knowledge is superior to that of your audience, if you have a store of languages at your command, if you have had the advantage of a university education and the academic knowledge it gives, if you have specialized knowledge, don't strain them in your conversation. The person who drags in a classical quotation, or splits hairs on a moot point is guilty of pedantry. One should be particular to be modest in a company where one's own achievements are superior.

Avoid scandal. Scandal is a base, ungentlemanly thing to indulge in, and however much your listeners seem to enjoy it, they can but form a low opinion of your good breeding if you engage in it. If you are placed in company which relishes such type of talk, you should not feel any obligation to join in it, and to show your contempt of it in a tactful, courteous way is an act of courage, and indicative of a well-principled character.

Avoid making excuses. If one has failed to keep an appointment or a promise, it is much better to admit frankly one's failure than to make excuses—which are usually insincere and often patently so. A weak excuse is always open to doubt and an extravagant one often admits of discrepancies which will later become obvious. "I had a headache," "I wasn't feeling well," "I couldn't get there in time," are so feeble and so generously used by most people, that they become mere indications of the lightness which one attaches to one's commitments. Equally futile are the conditional remarks one so often hears, "Oh dear, I wish I'd known, I'd certainly have come," or "if you had told me, I'd have done it immediately." The event is over and the futility of discussing its possibilities under different circumstances is only too obvious. Be frank enough to own your breach of good faith and resolve not to have to make a similar admission again.

Avoid making light promises. A promise is a serious and sacred obligation to carry out a certain contract. It is the habit of many people to make promises with the idea that it doesn't matter whether they are kept or not.

This is a contemptible practice and deserving of thorough condemnation. Even the smallest promise should be kept or an adequate explanation and compensation given for one's failure to keep it. Often a promise is broken because one has not thought of it implications or has not had the courage to refuse making it. One should refuse invitations at the risk of incurring displeasure rather than accept them in order to please someone when one has no intention of carrying them out.

Lastly, avoid forgetting or omitting to apply all these rules of conversational etiquette to members of one's family or to one's friends. That they are better known to you, does not exempt you from showing them the same courtesies in conversation as you would others who are less familiar. Although among family members and friends, we automatically have more latitude in conversation, yet we should not overstep the bounds of etiquette when we are in their midst. We should choose our subject matter and present it as carefully as if we were conversing with outsiders· intimate associates are as much entitled to our best as anyone else. If our conversation at home is slack and graceless, we shall form a habit of poor conversation which will show itself when we talk with others. A good standard of conversation in the family is a sound basis for a good general conversational technique and ability.

## CHAPTER V

### *G O S S I P*

It is difficult to define the word "gossip" or to distinguish between gossip and history. For example, the child who tells his mother about his and his friends' adventures is a historian; he is also a gossip. He is a historian in so far as he deals with the truth of certain facts, and he is a gossip in so far as he wishes to propagate those facts. Where does history end and gossip begin? Or are both merged together so that there is no line of demarcation? We may think of autobiographies or biographies as works which are made up of gossip. We may think of them, too, as histories. What then is he distinguishing mark between the two? Briefly, history is subjective and remote, gossip personal and intimate. Whatever we may say about a person who lived in the remote past, we are not considered gossips. Yet we may not with the same impunity say a similar thing about a person known to us. We shall be labelled as a "gossip" which carries with it an indefinable stigma.

Why the attitude towards a gossip and a historian should be in such contrast is due to their respective approaches and intentions. The historian has an intellectual and universal approach to his subject and a worthy intention. The gossip is considered to have an emotional, per-

sonal approach and an intention which is often thought to be unworthy—though it may not be so. So many people shun gossip because they are not satisfied that it is motivated by honourable intentions. So the harmless Saxon word "gossip," originally "God's sib" meaning "Gid's kindred," has degenerated to its present meaning. It is an unfortunate degeneration, but we must accept that meaning in this chapter.

Yet we can enter into conversation of a very personal matter without "gossiping" in the accepted sense of the word. In fact, Benson in his essay on conversation tells us that an impersonal talker is "like a dull dog." And most people would presumably agree that conversation bereft of the personal element is colourless and uncourageous. But we must be clear as to what is included in personal talk, and how much latitude is allowed in it before the bounds of propriety, graciousness and courtesy are crossed.

Most of our personal talk may be summed up under criticism and chatter. We may justly admit the personal element in criticism if we criticise usefully and in a genial spirit. It must in fact be scientific criticism, freely admitting an element of humour. It must not be criticism undertaken to disparage an achievement, it must include the good as well as the bad, it must be founded on personal knowledge not hearsay, and should be embarked on with a view to show 'appreciation, or tender correction, and here one should be sure that one is qualified to correct. Very little criticism which we normally hear or indulge in can stand up to all these qualifications. Most of the

criticism one often hears is solely destructive, hastily arrived at, and ungraciously intended. A discussion group gives great scope for scientific criticism, yet seldom is such criticism heard generally. Most personal criticism is the product of small-minded people, for the deep-thinking person is more capable of realising difficulties of achievement, and is therefore slow to summarize or disparage endeavours. "I do not like the way she dresses," "He plays awful tennis," and "I don't like him at all," and so on, are unworthy criticisms and indications of a petty way of thinking. This "I don't like" vogue of prefacing one's critical remarks is vain and presumptuous. It matters little whether you like or dislike something, unless you are in the firm position of being an authority on it, when you will be usually found to be slow to give an opinion. If in your criticism you man to disparage or to find an outlet for your own embitterments or malicious thoughts, your motives will be easily recognised, and duly deprecated. If on the other hand your intention is the kindly one of offering constructive thought, appreciation and suggestion, and you do so in a modest way, you are doing creative work of some value and helping the progress of ideas, and that enrichment of thought which one gets from mental intercourse with an imaginative and cultured intellect.

Chatter of a personal nature, crisp remarks, amusing anecdotes, are welcomed in informal conversation and add colour to it if they are genial and free from malice or bitterness. On the other hand, personal invective is wrong and misleading, and the same can be said of it as has been

said of petty criticism. But we can get a lot of fun out of personal chatter without its becoming slanderous.

It is malignity which marks gossip from scandal. Malignant gossip is scandal. Of scandal Sheridan aptly remarks:

> "So strong, so swift, the monster there's no gagging,
> Cut Scandal's head off still the tongue is wagging."

Psychologists tell us that scandal proceeds from a mentally disordered mind, a mind that lacks coherence. This can be readily appreciated when one considers the type of person who usually indulges in scandal. Seldom is it the industrious office worker, or the over-wrought professional person, or the scientific investigator, but the scatter-brain, the idler, the mistress of the house who leaves all her work to her servants—for these have so little with which to occupy their minds, no steady intellectual pursuit to refresh or stimulate them.

Similarly, ill-intentioned talk is taboo in good society. Ill-natured gossip, slander, scandal, talking about a person behind his back, revealing confidences, are base and contemptible, and show lack of dignity and culture. One must realise that a person's character is easily revealed in his refusal or acceptance to enter into such conversation. It is dangerous, too, in so far as the law provides protection to individuals against defaming statements and insinuations.

We may divide malignant talk into two classes. That which exposes something true and that which is fabrication. One may with impunity say something distasteful yet true about a person, for the law stipulates that one is no liable to be punished for defamation if the statement one has made is true, yet justifiable and "for the public good." But it is ill-natured and small-minded to do so unless under exceptionally provocative circumstances. To draw attention to a social blunder of a person, to his tendency to excess in some direction, to his errors, or to belittle achievement or disparage idiosyncracies is mean and indefensible; and in doing so, one reveals far more of one's own character than that of the other person. We can enjoy laughing and ridiculing weaknesses and peculiarities of character when we see them in fictitious beings. Most people, for instance, would enjoy Sheridan's sparkling "School for Scandal," with its brilliant invective and repartee, yet we should feel some qualms of conscience if we said similar things about characters who were real and were known to us, and if in saying such things we wished to be spiteful and malicious. This prattling tittle-tattle is, we usually read, confined to the conversation of women. This is not so, and men who have the mental slackness which comes from lack of responsibility and idleness are just as much given to it. We should remember that there is so much beauty and strength of character in most people in which we can absorb ourselves that only a distorted mind would want to concentrate on ugliness, and weakness of character.

Mahaffy has said, "The topic which ought to be al-

ways interesting is the discussion of human character and human motives. If the novel be so popular a form of literature, how can the novel in real life fail to interest an intelligent company? People of serious temper and philosophic habit will be able to confine themselves to large ethical views and the general dealings of men; but to average people, both men and women, and perhaps most of all to busy men who desire to find in society relaxation from their toil, that lighter and more present kind of criticism on human affairs will prevail, which is known as gossip. It is idle to deny that there is no kind of conversation more fascinating than this. But its immorality may easily become such as to shock honest minds, and the man who indulges in it too freely at the expense of others will probably have to pay the cost of it himself in the long run, for those who hear him will fear him, and will retire into themselves in his presence."

The other kind of malignant talk, fabricated talk, lies, rumours, untrue defaming of character and insinuation, are all included in defamation and are punishable as such. This talk is not only contemptible and undignified, but dangerous, for it can be dealt with under criminal law. Far too often is this talk freely indulged in with impunity. On the other hand some of the most famous trials in the history of law have been concerned with it, and the defamers have been duly punished. To impute things either with or without the intention of lowering a person in the estimation of others is never done by people aware of their own responsibilities or their own traditions. People who are thrilled to pass on the small tit-bits of scandal they

hear or who enlarge on it until it is distorted and grotesque are inexpressively despicable. Their version of the imputation is as far away from the truth as the final version of the whispering game played at parties, when a sentence is chosen, whispered from one to another, and the last player says the sentence that reached him. When the original was "all's well that ends well" and the final version was "devils are in hell", we can well understand the process of distortion which goes on as thoughts are passed from one ear to another.

Scandal-mongers are equally pleased to misrepresent statements, to impute to them meanings quite different from what was obviously intended, or to paraphrase a statement incorrectly to suit a mean purpose. We should be very particular that we don't allow such people to "get away with it." If we are meticulously careful over the meanings and renderings and paraphrasing of the talk we hear, we should be able to detect and confound persons who neglect such a careful approach. If one constantly heckles a gossip by cross-examination, "Are you sure that was the word used?" "Are those the exact words?" or "I'm sure that wasn't what was meant," then the speaker's sense of guilt usually rises, he becomes confused, and he feels he is on such unfirm ground that he gives up his ill-meant effort.

The best way to deal with malignant chatterers is to make it clear, politely but firmly, that you will have nothing to do with ill-intentioned talk, and that you consider it undignified and dangerous. Much private un-

happiness has been caused by it, much professional damage has resulted from it, and much national honour shattered by it, for nations as much as individuals have been the bait of malicious opportunists. To attempt to deprive one of one's honour, is the worst of all depravities. As Shakespeare says,

> "He who steals my purse, steals trash,
> But he who taketh away my good name
> Takes that which does not belong to him
> And leaves me poor indeed."

In a translation of Beaumarchais' "Le Barbier de Seville," we read a vividly expressive description of Scandal: "Calumny! You don't really know what you are disdaining when you disdain it. I have seen persons of the utmost probity laid low by it, or nearly so. Believe me, there is no false report however crude, no abomination, no absurd falsehood, which the idlers in a great city, cannot if they take the trouble, make universally believed—and here we have tittle-tattles who are past masters in their art. . . . First of all they circulate a faint rumour which skims the surface of the ground like a swallow just before a storm, pianissimo and murmurous, so that it seems to pass without leaving a trace; but really, in its passage, it has implanted its poisonous germs. Some ear has heard it, some mouth repeats it. . . the mischief has been done. It spouts like a mushroom, spreads like a swelling wave, until it becomes the very devil; so that, all of a sudden, who can tell how, the calumny has taken shape, is enlarging, is growing steadily under all men's eyes. It extends the

range of its flight, its great wings making the roar of a whirlwind, of a whirlwind which, amid rolling thunder, sweeps everything into its resistless eddy, until, through Heaven's will, it becomes a general clamour, a public crescendo, a universal chorus of hatred and contempt. Who can stand up against such a typhoon?"

## CHAPTER VI

### *THE PART LISTENING PLAYS*

---

We have up till now, dealt with that part of conversation which has to do with talking. But there is another part equally important—that which deals with listening. We are told, "silence may be a surer sign of wisdom than any speech." We are not good conversationalists if we can talk well but not listen well, any more than we could be good tennis players if we could serve well but not return well. Many people consider the man who can talk a lot, talk in a lively way, never lacking a subject and talking incessantly, to be a good talker. Such a talker is usually the opposite, for he has not mastered the fundamental principle of conversation. He has failed to understand the value of conversation—that giving and taking of ideas which makes conversation the enriching and vital process that it is. In this, he is, intentionally or otherwise, showing his contempt of another's knowledge, and the presumptuousness of his own.

Contrast with him the man who has grasped the fundamental reciprocal idea of conversation. He talks in his turn and in his turn he listens. He gives the best of his ideas to others, and they give the best of their ideas to him. He has gained by their conversation, and they have gained by his. By mutual engrossment in what the other has said,

each has added something to his intellectual store, and has maintained that balance in conversation which suggests social and intellectual responsibility. This is indicative of culture.

To be a good listener indicates intelligence, too. Today, we have every incentive to make us good listeners. We listen to the radio, to plays, to films, to operas, to music and so forth, and the more intelligently we listen to them, the more enjoyment and benefit we derive from them. But we need not suppose that we should be familiar with the subject of the conversation if we are to listen intelligently, nor need we adopt the attitude of a note-taker as he listens to a lecture. We can listen with intelligence to a subject we know nothing about, if we choose to, and we should do so gracefully and easily. Naturally, the degree of intelligence we assert will vary with our mental ability. Listeners who have a superior mental capacity can obviously get more out of a conversation, than those whose mental capacity is inferior. We should bear in mind that much of our mental progress is made through listening. That is why listening plays such an important part in the training of the young. Even as infants we learned to listen. We listened to simple bed-time stories, and through them we achieved concentration, memory power and a sense of logic by which we could recapitulate their logical sequence of events. Through this listening we acquired knowledge too. We learnt the meaning, however vague and simple, of words such as "ghosts," "fairies" and all the other paraphernalia of children's stories. In adult life our listening has brought our know-

ledge to gigantic proportions with allusions, quotations, technicalities and references of all descriptions. In fact, after our period of formal education is over, much of our educational progress is made through listening and the use to which we put what we have listened to.

But how, you may ask, can one be a good listener. First we must have sympathy with the speaker. Mahaffy says, "The first condition of any conversation at all, is that people should have their minds so far in sympathy that they are willing to talk upon the same subject, and to hear what each member of the company thinks about it. . . ." Sympathy should not however be excessive in quality which makes it demonstrative. We have an excellent word to describe the over-sympathetic person when we say that he or she is 'gushing.' To achieve this sympathy, consider first of all your attitude towards the speaker. Do you think your own mental ability superior to his, Do you think your power of expression better? If you do, you will have to readjust your attitude so that your superiority is subdued. Take whatever the conversation has to offer you and use it to the best advantage. It may not be so enriching as you would have liked it, but even so contact with any mind can be a stimulating experience if we choose to make it so.

If we listen sympathetically to a speaker, we are precluded from the fault of interruption. Interruption, besides being unmannerly, has a very disappointing effect on the one who has been interrupted. "Oh yes, I know that," or "I heard that some time ago," immediately de-

prives the speaker of the joy of narrating an experience. He wishes to make a contribution but he has been denied the privilege of doing so. His offering has been prematurely refused. To impart knowledge is an act of generosity and we should no more think of refusing it than we should of refusing a duplicate wedding present. We should accept it in the spirit in which it was offered, and turn it to whatever account we can.

There are other interruptions like exclamations, mutterings of approval or disapproval, rhetorical questions and "aside" remarks. Often those listeners who are over-anxious to please, feel that they can best do so by breaking into a conversation with obvious signs of approval. Collier has said, "It is perhaps more true of women than of men that they conceive affability as a concession. At any rate, it is not unusual to find a hostess busying herself with attempts to agree with all that is said with the idea that she is thereby doing homage to the effeminate categorical imperative of etiquette, when in reality nothing becomes more quickly tiring than incessant affirmatives, no matter how pleasantly they are modulated. Nor can one avoid one of two conclusions when one's talk is thus negligently agreed to; either the speaker is confining herself entirely to incontradictable platitudes, or the listener has no mind of her own; and in either case, silence were golden." He then goes on to quote a French writer, and this prompts him to add, "Not even a lover can fail to be bored at last by the constant lassitude of assent expressing itself in twin sentiments. 'Coquetting with an echo,' Carlyle called it. For though it makes a man feel mentally

masterful at first, it makes him feel mentally maudlin at last."

Another kind of interruption is that which makes a listener finish off the sentence of a speaker. A quick mind often anticipates what a speaker is about to say, or how he will complete his idea, but the speaker should be left to take his own time over it. A flash of disappointment must inevitably cross the speaker's mind if he feels that his listeners have arrived at the goal before him. Such interrupters are interlopers. They are like those who put the finishing touches to a piece of work and accept the credit. They have bereft their companion of the sense of achievement. They have taken upon themselves the triumph that was another's. One writer pugnaciously writes of such interrupters, "I have heard interrupters praised for this, as indicating a rapidity of mind which arrived at the end before the other was half way through. But I should feel as much disposed to knock a man down who took my words out of my mouth, as one who stole my money out of my pocket. Such a habit may be a credit to one's powers, but not one's modesty or good feeling. What is it but saying, 'My dear sir, you are making a very bungling piece of work with that sentence of yours; allow me to finish it for you in proper style.'"

Equally obnoxious is the practice of some listeners of supplying the speaker with the appropriate word should he delay in his speech. We should never be guilty of this unless the delay is embarrassingly long and the speaker is obviously pained by his failing. The same can be said

in the case of stammering or stuttering. It may be tactful to help in such a lapse yet on the other hand it may be detrimental to the speaker's self-confidence to do so. Discretion should be the guide. A good listener also needs the gift of patience. It may be irritating to listen to a person who clings tenaciously to his conversation, or to a tedious bore who relates dull anecdotes and repeats the same thing over and over again. We can hardly be expected to be generous listeners among such people, yet although this presumptuous talker can add little to our store of ideas, let him at least be a manifestation of one type of human being—a piece of psychology we can go home and think about, and a notable example of what we should avoid in our own conversation. On the other hand, our patience can help the timid talker immeasurably. The shy retiring talker is often so because he has had little encouragement to be anything else. He has never found himself the centre of an eager group of listeners, and has therefore receded more and more into the background. A patient listener can give confidence to such a person. A modern writer has very convincingly pleaded the cause of the shy and timid in these words, "Although 'twould be less trouble to just count shy people dumb, and give up trying when they seem uninteresting and glum, yet if we knew the horror of a nervous mind—ah well, I think we'd want to use our tact to coax them from their shell."

Another quality for a good listener is that of attentiveness. The restive inattentive pupil at school is usually the dull pupil; in rare cases it may be the brilliant pupil whose mind has quickly grasped the implications of a

problem or idea and is restlessly eager to proceed further. We cannot expect to get much from conversation, especially intellectual conversation if we do not give to it the whole of our attention. Besides, inattention is discourteous. The person who with a "really" or "yes" fritters away a conversation is usually a dull-witted person; his undisciplined mind is drifting elsewhere, but to suggest politeness he punctuates his listening with such interrupting repetitions. He is like the person who claps in between movements of a musical composition. But the careful listener gives full heed to a conversation, and is able to make appropriate remarks and ask suitable questions. The more appropriate the listener's questions are, the more intelligently has he listened. Intelligent questions are the very essence of progressive talk. They make conversation dynamic. They insure that all possibilities of a subject are explored; they bring different points of view to bear on the subject, which lifts it from the arid state into which unquestioned conversation drifts. The person who with his "how odd" or 'exactly" ignores his conversational partners has made the conversation static. It has become the work of one mind. There has been no reaction. The talk has been a one-sided affair.

Lastly, a good listener needs to be appreciative. Just as every person we meet should make an impression on us, so every conversation should do so too. It is true that that impression may be imperceptible, but it nevertheless exists. Dr. Arnold said, "As a general rule, no man can fall into conversation with another without being able to learn something valuable from him. But in order to get

at this benefit there must be something of an accommodating spirit on both sides; each must be ready to hear candidly an answer fairly." However slight that benefit may be, we should be appreciative of it. We can best show our appreciation by the interest we take in the conversation and by our encouragement of it. We shall find that the more genuine interest we have in people and ideas, the better listeners we shall be, and the more benefit we shall derive from our listening.

## CHAPTER VII

## *YOUR COMMAND OF ENGLISH*

A good command of English will amply repay one, for not only is it of the utmost value in business and social life, but it helps one to write better, to appreciate literature more, and to increase one's enjoyment of many forms of entertainment, such as plays, films, etc.

The first requisite for a good command of English is a large and varied vocabulary. Both quantity and quality are necessary. In most things we are apt to think the quantity may be neglected if the quality is good. With reference to one's vocabulary that is not the case. Basic English has sought to reduce the extent of our vocabulary; it has done so with a worthy purpose in mind, and so far as its purpose is concerned it has achieved success. But one could never appreciate Basic English for normal conversational and literary purposes, if one were really familiar with normal English. An abridged vocabulary naturally has to omit those fine shades of meaning, those rich words of foreign complexion, which lend colour and force to our language. The person whose vocabulary is small must of necessity engage in colourless speech. He has not the tools for his work. With the primitive Stone Age tools, what crude weapons were produced. They had no polish, no shapeliness, no style, and no perfection. So with the

speech of the man who has not adequate tools—his words —at his disposal. He must needs say, "the acting was fine," when he means it was masterly, he will tell you that the magician was good when he means he was skilful, he will say that the book was nice, when he means it was stimulating. To speak well and effectively, one must have enough words at one's command to carry on conversations with people in many different walks of life, and to listen to people discussing a variety of topics or lecturing upon a diversity of subjects. How much enjoyment and mental enrichment we are deprived of by not being able to follow someone's meaning. We say to ourselves, "I missed the point of his talk because I didn't understand the meaning of the words he used." We should get into the habit of referring to the dictionary for words whose meaning we do not understand. We should make ourselves familiar with them and incorporate them in our own conversation. The same applies to technical words, to foreign words which have been incorporated into the language in their foreign form, and to literary and classical references. A good store of all these will help us to enter into conversations with confidence and understanding.

The person who has not learnt the fine shades of distinction between different words, consequently expresses himself vaguely and unattractively. Because of this he gets into the very prevalent habit of over-using certain vague-meaning words, such as *good, pleasant, fine, nice.* This renders conversation very lifeless. A good number of adjectives is a most important essential for attractive speech.

A person who has a good command over the language, sees that it is well-chosen. What has been said about the suitability of subject-matter is equally applicable here. The language of the drawing-room is quite different from that of the office. One might request one's office associate "to get a move on," if he is inclined to be slow, but one would hardly use the same expression to a gentleman seeking his place at a dinner party. A person with an abundant and well-chosen vocabulary will not choose to discuss in slang and colloquialisms the quality of an artistic masterpiece, nor will he discuss in studied scholastic terms the fluctuations of the stock exchange. To be able to use the right vocabulary in the right place shows culture and social experience. And one must be able to gauge one's company as it were, and use the type of language discretion directs. Again, it is useless to use language which your company does not understand. Some misdirected people think this raises them in the estimation of their listeners, but among good society, which is not easily impressionable, this is not so. Dr. Johnson gives a famous example of how useless such talk can be: "I was once present at the lecture of a profound philosopher, a man really skilled in the science which he 'professed' who having occasion to explain the terms 'opacum' and 'pellucidum,' told us after some hesitation that 'opacum' was as one might say 'opake,' and that 'pellucidum' signified 'pellucid.' Such was the dexterity with which this learned man facilitated to his auditors the intricacies of science; and so true it is that a man may know what he cannot teach."

Another important point in discussing one's command

over a language is to realise that one must also be able to use colloquialisms freely and easily, and contracted forms of words too. Not to be able to do so is to show oneself unfamiliar with Englishmen's English. And again, many people to whom the language is foreign make the mistake of transferring their grammar book English to conversation. A blatant example is, "I will not go the house of my cousin." This is perhaps obvious enough to be absurd, but it serves its purpose of showing how stilted grammar book English can be when it is used in conversation. *Oughn't, they'll, won't, isn't, mayn't,* are forms regularly used in ordinary talk, and we should prefer them to the more formal, *ought not, they will, will not is not* and *may not.*

Again another important essential for good conversational ability is to have a comprehensive knowledge of idiomatic English, for this forms the major part of informal talk. A list of the more common idioms is given in another chapter.

With regard to pronunciation, one's English should be King's English, that is standard English, the English of the normal cultured person, not dialect, nor affected English. Standard English implies culture, dignity, fluency and familiarity with current pronunciation changes. Local speech peculiarities should be avoided, they only confound one's listeners who are unacquainted with them, and indicate a small and limited experience of society.

A last word—it is always useful to study the grammar of the language, though it is not necessary to tabulate

the more intricate uses of the parts of speech, but one should be able to recognise the usual parts of speech, and know their more frequent uses. A knowledge of the figures of speech is useful too, especially if one is interested in becoming a good writer.

Below is given a few of the more common mistakes one is apt to make, and a number of important points to remember for the acquisition of an easy command of the language.

1. Use the nominative case after the verb "to be" in any of its parts.

*E.g.*, Don't say—It is *me.* It is *I,* is correct.

2. Use the accusative case after a preposition.

*E.g.*, Don't say—Between you and *I.* "Between" is a preposition and as such must be followed by the accusative of the noun or pronoun following, therefore—Between you and *me,* is correct.

3. "Than" is followed by the nominative case.

*E.g.*, He works harder than *I;* not—He works harder than *me.*

4. Don't use singular nouns with plural verbs, nor plural nouns with singular verbs.

E.g., These pieces of cake *is* good, should be—these pieces of cake *are* good. This is of course a very obvious example. Less obvious are those sentences in which the subject is involved or difficult to determine.

*E.g.*, One of the many girls with whom I went to school

*were* with us, instead of—One of the many girls with whom we went to school *was* with us.

5. Collective nouns, nouns which denote a number of things considered as one entity, are followed by a singular verb.

*E.g.*, A flock of sheep *was* passing by, not—A flock of sheep *were* passing by.

6. *Every* and *each* take a singular verb.

E.g., Each of the numbers *are* correct, should be—Each of the numbers *is* correct.

7. *Either* and *neither* take a singular verb.

*E.g.*, There were two candidates, neither of whom *were* accepted, should be—There were two candidates, neither of whom *was* accepted.

8. *You,* is always followed by the plural verb whether it denotes one person or things, or more than one.

E.g., You *were* always good to me, is correct, not—You *was* always good to me.

9. Don't use "their" to refer to singular pronouns such as *each, one, anybody, everybody, his, her.*

*E.g.*, Each is able to follow *their* own inclination, is wrong. One should say—Each is able to follow *his* (or *her*) own inclination.

10. Don't use double negative, *i.e.*, two negatives in one sentence, *e.g.*, I don't want *none,* is wrong. We should say—I don't want *any.*

Less obvious are those sentences which contain an implied negative, *e.g.*, I *don't* eat hardly anything. This

is wrong. "Hardly" is a negative word. We should say—I eat hardly anything.

11. In negative questions, see that the correct negative word is attached to the correct auxiliary in the question part of the sentence.

*E.g.*, It does shine brightly, *isn't it*? is wrong. We should say—It does shine brightly, *doesn't it*? The rule to remember is that the auxiliary previously used is repeated in the question part. If you have originally used does." then follow it with "doesn't", "is" with "isn't," "may". with "mayn't," etc. This is quite different from the French, which has *n'est ce pas—isn't it*—at the end of questions.

12. Don't split infinitives. The infinitive consists of—to+the verb, *e.g.*, to go—is an infinitive. Splitting the infinitive is separating these two parts.

*E.g.*, I am going to quickly go to bed, is a case of the split infinitive. We should say—I am going to go to bed quickly.

13. Don't say—different *to*, say—different *from*.

*E.g.*, He is different *from* me; not, He is different *to* me.

14. When comparing two nouns or pronouns use "like," not "as."

*E.g.*, She is *like* a queen; not, She is *as* a queen.

15. When the "as . . . as" construction is being used as a means of comparison, don't forget to put in the first "as"

E.g., She works hard as I do, should be—She works *as* hard *as* I do.

16. Don't use the expression "as to when," nor "as

to whether," use simply "when" or "whether" respectively.

E.g., I don't know *as to when* I am coming, should be—I don't know *when* I am coming.

And, He is not sure *as to whether* he will come, should be—He is not sure *whether* he will come.

17. Don't be redundant in your speech.

*E.g.*, I hope you will return back, should simply be—I hope you will return. "Return" means to come back, therefore the addition of "back" causes a redundancy.

18. Avoid using "those sort." Instead use "that sort."

E.g., I do not like *those sort* of people, should be—I do not like that sort of person.

19. Avoid qualifying words which in themselves are absolute.

This mistake is usually made with these words: *ideal, unique, perfect.* This is not an exhaustive list, but these are the most common.

E.g., It was a *very ideal* place for a school, should be—It was an *ideal* place for a school.

I thought it *most* perfect, should be—I thought it *perfect.* A thing is either perfect or not perfect. The house was *quite unique* should be—The house was *unique.*

20. Avoid using "the same" to refer to an antecedent. This is often found in poor commercial writing.

E.g., We have just published our catalogue, and shall be

pleased to send you copy of *the same*, is wrong, and should read—We have just published our catalogue, and shall be pleased to send you a copy *of it*.

21. Avoid using archaisms, *i.e.*, words which are now considered old fashioned, or out of date. Archaisms are still found in poetry, but not in conversation. The most common are, *perchance, suffice it, aught, wherein, therein, thither, hither, whereof, save, ere, albeit, anent, it were, if . . . be, well nigh*. Here is a list of them with their modern equivalents:—

| | |
|---|---|
| Perchance | Perhaps |
| Suffice it | It is enough |
| Therein | In it |
| Thither | There |
| Hither | Here |
| Save | Except |
| Whereof | Of which |
| Wherein | In which |
| Ere | Before |
| Albeit | Though |
| Aught | Anything |
| Well nigh | Nearly |
| Anent | About |
| It were | It would be |
| If.....be | It.....is |

*E.g.*, If the solution *be* correct, we come to this conclusion. . . . is wrong. If the solution *is* correct, we come to this conclusion . . . . is right.

22. Avoid certain expressions which are "un-English," and show an unobservant or unfamiliar acquaintance with King's English. These are the most commonly heard:—

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| How did you fare, | instead of, | How did you get on, or How did you do. |
| I also am going | ,, ,, | I am going too. |
| I did this only | ,, ,, | I merely did this |
| I wished her | ,, ,, | I wished her good-morning (evening, etc.) or, I said good-morning (etc.) to her. |

Please do the needful, instead of, Please do what is necessary.

I have lived here since ten years, instead of, I have lived here for ten years.

# CHAPTER VIII

## *ELOCUTION*

---

Elocution is a cultural art, but it has never been given that importance which other cultural arts have obtained for themselves. To speak effectively and beautifully is a great gift which few possess naturally; but like all arts it can with practice be developed to a high standard of perfection.

History has taught us that great importance used to be attached to formal training in elocution. In old Greek and oriental education, educationalists were very conscious of the power of speech, and the practice of declamation and oratory formed a large part of the educational curriculum of the wealthier classes. In the Homeric age, the two-fold ideal of Greek education was to produce men of wisdom and men of action—"the speaker of words and the doer of deeds." To achieve wisdom, one had, among other things, to be able to compel and persuade through one's words. So a great deal of attention was paid to those subjects where the power of speech was an essential factor. So much significance did Demosthenes pay to the power of speech that in order to enlarge the power of his voice, he used to go to the sea-shore, gather pebbles, and rolling them round in his mouth, practise his oratory—an original, yet judging from his later place as an orator, a very suc-

cessful elocution exercise. Indeed, power of speech was one of the deciding factors for promotion in Greek civic life, and it went a long way in raising one's prestige among the people. Through it, one could command, compel and persuade.

In medieval times, the ability to be able to speak forcibly, was fully recognised by the Church, and argument and the delivering of sermons were essential items in the training of ecclesiastics.

But the modern age has not placed so much significance on formal training in speechcraft, and our great politicians and public figures do not attach much importance to formal training in oratory. In fact, elocution is thought to be something rather feminine, an "extra" for girls' schools, and for people who have plenty of time at their disposal for such an unnecessary study. That elocution has been relegated to such a position is, to some extent, the fault of elocutionists themselves, for in seeking to gain a place for their art, they have overburdened it with technicalities. They want us to know the anatomy of the throat, they label each simple sound in a formidably technical language—voiced point, labials, voiced aspirates, explosives, etc.—and we have almost to enter into the rigours of gymnastics to control our breath, and then at length, having mastered these arduous necessities we find ourselves being asked to recite poems and Shakespearean extracts. Elocutionists have, therefore, failed to correlate elocution to the needs of everyday life, with the result that their art has become a mere annual amusement for a

fond mother at a Christmas party, when her five-year-old recites his "elocution." Consequently a pupil may have started elocution when very young, continued with it until the highest exam has been passed and yet at the end have acquired little more than a stage voice. Often one's ordinary conversational ability and tone have gained nothing. He or she has acquired no ability to make an impromptu speech, nor to argue in debate nor to address a gathering. Much is the fault of elocution examinations which have made it easy for the pupil to pass after mastering the grammar of elocution and its formal practice, and have made any other qualifications of speech unnecessary.

However, in spite of the ungenerous recognition given to elocution by modern educationalists, it nevertheless has an obvious appeal and value, and this should enable it to find its way into the educational curricula of the future.

Here we shall deal with a few rules of elocution, without referring to difficult technicalities. If these rules are understood and practised conscientiously there is no reason why even the most diffident speaker should not reach a good average ability to speak well. One should remember, however, that before setting out to study the principles and practice of elocution, one should become speech conscious. This can be done by listening to every word that one says oneself, so that one can criticise one's own efforts, and by listening to the speech of others. With this consciousness, naturally mistakes will become much more obvious and their rectification a matter of learning certain rules and putting them into practice. But we must realise that mistakes cannot be rectified before they are realised,

and so this resolve to become speech conscious should be serious and whole-hearted.

Now we shall first discuss breathing in relation to good voice production.

*BREATHING*

Breath is, so to speak, the driving power of the voice. If our car is to run well, we must obviously have enough petrol to drive it. In the same way, if our voice has to do a certain amount of talking, we must obviously have a sufficient supply of breath for that process. But how can we get that supply of breath? First of all, we must cultivate the habit of deep breathing. Not noisy and gasping breathing, but silent and controlled. We should habituate ourselves to breathing in such a way that we do not become conscious of it, nor think of it in terms of a duty, nor make any special effort about it. Of course, for formal speech training classes or in the privacy of our own homes, we can practise with advantage many speech training exercises designed for speech improvement. If we want to elaborate these, we may accompany them with movements of the body and with sounds.

Then, once we have established a sufficient supply of breath, we must learn to control it. We must harness it to get the maximum use from it. A good singer has to have very precise control over his breath; he cannot afford to miss a few notes because he hasn't enough breath with which to sing them, or is gasping for more. We can often test accurately the condition of our own breath control by singing. If we find ourselves having to lose notes in order

to take breath we know that our breath control is not all that it ought to be. Gasping, panting, stopping for breath in the middle of a word or prase, and swallowing words at the end of a sentence are all indications of our lack of breath control.

The first requisite for such control is a good posture. The round-shouldered, contracted-chested person cannot expand his lungs satisfactorily, for air cannot readily enter when he is in such a cramped position. Stand erect, sit erect, not stiffly but easily, and your breath control will automatically improve. Practise controlling your breath by sustained breathing, that is, hold on to the breath for a given time. Don't try sustaining the breath for a ridiculously long period, until you feel like bursting. Hold it for a few seconds at the beginning and gradually work up to about ten seconds or any individual comfortable maximum. This has all to do with breathing in or inhaling. Then you must learn to breathe out or exhale. Exhaling is just as important as inhaling or sustaining. Do it with the same silence and ease as you have learnt to inhale.

Here is a good all-round breathing exercise. Breathe in while mentally counting ten, hold on to the breath still counting ten to yourself and then breathe out in the same way.

A. *IN*...........*HOLD ON TO BREATH*............. *OUT*..............Practise this exercise over and over again until you can do it without effort. If you cannot at first manage counting ten comfortably, try counting five, and gradually increase to ten. Such exercises should be done

at leisure and not after a heavy meal or strenuous exercise. After you have mastered this exercise, do the following:—

B. This is the same as A, but instead of counting ten mentally, count aloud or better still use a vowel sound. This leads us to the next exercise:—

C. This exercise is again similar to A, but is accompanied with movements of the arms. Raise the arms gradually as you inhale, keep them raised while you hold on to the breath, and lower them gradually while you exhale. This may also be done with exercise B.

When you can do these exercises comfortably, you will find yourself able to read and speak difficult passages with perfect breath control. No longer will you gasp in the middle of a sentence, nor will you have so little breath to spare at the end that the last words are inaudible.

Now we pass on to articulation.

### *ARTICULATION*

Articulation is the quality of being able to pronounce distinctly and enunciate clearly. In "Hamlet," Hamlet instructs the players in the art of articulation. This is what he says: "Speak the speech I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue; but if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I'd have lief the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand; but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and I may say, whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness."

To achieve good articulation, it is necessary to know how to say each sound of the alphabet, and to know how those sounds are produced. It is not however essential to have a knowledge of the anatomy of the throat, nor to be acquainted with technical terms in elocution. To speak of laterals, gutturals, aspirates, etc., means little to an ordinary person, and it is for him an unnecessary complication of simple things though such knowledge may be useful if one wants to pursue the subject to an advanced, academic degree.

For the ordinary requirements of the average person, a good basis can be formed by listening to good speakers, or by learning the sounds of the vowels and consonants from a simple elocution manual. Notice the shape of the mouth, and the position of the tongue and teeth when each sound is made. Notice too, whether the sound comes from the nose or throat, and whether much breath is used, or only a little. It is very important to notice these things, for then you will become conscious of the exact way in which sounds are made, and will be able to rectify any mistakes you may make. Practise this sound production in front of a mirror. Each sound, whether vowel or consonant, should be practised first in isolation. Then put it in a word and practise it. And when you open your mouth, open your throat too. A good way of doing this is to swallow or yawn. Now notice your lips, every sound has a different lip formation. Usually the lips should move energetically. The speaker who rarely moves his lips or moves them gently, is usually a mumbler, and is irritating to listen to. We say that such a speaker speaks

"through his teeth." With lips scarcely apart, and teeth clenched together, he mutters inaudibly and unintelligibly, for he has treated each sound in the same way, the position of teeth and lips being the same for one and all. A sound is an individual thing and each is distinct from the other. If we cannot easily recognise this distinction, it is a reflection on our knowledge of articulation. The following exercises will be a help in acquiring good articulation.

A. Take a long breath, and as you breathe out say aloud

M.........m.........m.........m.........m.........m...... mah
Repeat this using other consonants.

B. Take any vowel sound. Begin on a low speaking note and then as you repeat the sound, raise your tone one note higher until you have reached your highest note. (Don't sing. This refers to a speaking not a singing note.) Practise this with each vowel sound in turn.

Humming exercises are also very good for improving articulation. These exercises will help too in making your voice pleasing in tone. If you read monotonously, go on with these exercises until you find variety in your tone.

*VOWELS*

For the sake of convenience we may divide vowels into three classes:—

1. Long vowels.
2. Short vowels.
3. Diphthongs.

In Elocution manuals vowels marked—are long, those marked *u* are short. Diphthongs are combinations of two vowel sounds merged into one. Hold on to the long sounds and you will get a richer effect; the short ones should be cut off quickly; they become ugly and distorted if they are unduly lengthened. Each vowel should at first be practised in isolation, that is, not in a word. And vigorous lip movement should be used. It is well to exaggerate the lip movement in order to realise more easily the position of the tongue and teeth for each sound. When you have determined this, listen to the sound very carefully and be able to distinguish each from the other. Then practise picking out words at random, isolating their vowel sounds and saying them aloud. Make your own list of words for practice and mark each sound long or short or a diphthong. Here is a list of vowel sounds:—

*Long vowels*

*ah* as in father
*aw* as in law
*ee* as in been
*oo* as in boot

*Short vowels*

*a* as in mat
*er* as in purr
*e* as in ten
*i* as in sit
*o* as in pot
*u* as in cut
as in hood

*Diphthongs*

*ay* as in same
*i* as in mine
*o* as in gold
*oi* as in joy
*ow* as in mouse
*u* as in few

any simple vowel+*er* as in *more, their.*

Each diphthong is made up of two sounds.

ay = ay+ee
i = ah+ee
o = oh+oo
oi = aw+ee
ow= ah+oo
u = ee+oo

Of course when these sounds are found in words they are so blended that we hear a single sound only, but for the sake of practice we should pronounce each separately. For example, practise in this way:—

ay..ee ay..ee ay..ee ay
aw..ee aw..ee aw..ee oi

Look out for words ending in "er" and divide them into their correct sounds. For example, poor=oo+er, and door=aw+er.

Make your own list of such words and practise them.

*VOWEL RULES TO REMEMBER*

1. A vowel is usually long when it is followed by

a consonant+another vowel, *e.g.*, *incite, pave, flute, pole.*

2. Give the sound *oo* its full value. The lips should be pushed out and forward, and should be rounded. The mistake often made is to draw the lips in and round them, producing a sound as in the French "plume."

3. The diphthong *aw* is often deprived of its full value by the speaker opening his mouth too wide and broadening his lips. For this sound the lips should be pushed up and forward, and should form a very small hole.

4. The sound *ow* is often made incorrectly in so far as the lips are brought apart and widened. It should be made by pushing the lips slightly forward, a little way apart, and rounded rather than broadened.

5. The *er* in cultured English is usually pronounced "a," unless it occurs before a word beginning with a vowel, in which case the "r" sound (rolled) is distinctly heard.

## *CONSONANTS*

The sounds of consonants present little difficulty. Our most usual mistakes are not giving them their full value, and not pronouncing them distinctly. We often omit them at the end of words, join them to succeeding vowels or swallow them when our breath supply is depleted. Here are some rules which will help us to avoid mistakes in consonant pronunciation.

1. Pronounce the consonant at the end of a word distinctly.

*e.g.*, He *and* I, not He *an* I

A *plump* person, not a plum person

A *good* book, not a *goo* book

A *tactful* person, not a *tackful* person

This list could be prolonged indefinitely. The vowels we are most prone to omit are p, b, d, t, m, n.

2. Pronounce the consonant in the middle of a word distinctly. Usually failure to do this arises when there are double consonants, that is, when two consonants come together.

*e.g.*, Tattler, not ta-ler

Costly, not cosly

This fault can be easily corrected by pairing off two words, one ending and the other beginning with the same consonant.

*e.g.*, good day
crab bite
top point

3. Avoid pronouncing *sh* as *s*. Make a list of words containing both sounds and practise them repeatedly in a mirror, noticing the lip formation and the position of tongue and teeth for each. For *sh* the upper and lower lips are rounded and protruded, the teeth are close together but not touching. A stream of air oozes out as the sound is made. For *s*, the lips are fairly close together, but stretched broadly, the upper and lower teeth are touch; the lower

lip moves downward and stretches outwards as the sound is made. A hissing sound results.

4. Avoid saying *d* or *t* for the sound *th*. Practise the *th* sound by placing the tongue between the upper and the lower teeth, and biting it with the upper teeth as the sound is made. For the *th* sound as in *the*, the tongue protrudes less than it does for the *th* sound as in *thing*.

5. Roll your *r's* when two *r's* come together or when one *r* is followed by a vowel. Don't make them hard rebounding sounds. Roll the tongue quickly and lightly at the back of the upper front teeth. There should be no lip movement in the actual sound. The hard *r* which is very seldom to be used results from slight tongue movement and vigorous lip movement.

*e.g.*, merry (rolled)
peril (rolled)
heart (unrolled)

The hard *r* is used when it is joined to a consonant.

6. The consonants *c* and *g* are usually soft before *i* and *e*, and hard before *a*, *o* and *u*.

*e.g.*, *Soft* as in gin, German, cinnamon, ceases.
*Hard* as in gather, got gun, cat, cot, cunning.

This is a very general rule to which there are countless exceptions.

Now we pass on to another heading.

*INTERPRETATION*

Having mastered pronunciation, our next step is to put life into our words as we incorporate them into sen-

tences, and bring out their real and full force. We may be able to pronounce each word of a sentence perfectly, yet our speech may be lifeless and meaningless. We need to bring in many qualities to lend colour to our words. These qualities are rhythm, pace, inflection, modulation and intensity.

*RHYTHM*

This does not imply a sing-song voice. It implies smoothness and control of pace and phrasing. To speak hesitatingly, gasping for breath, and with faulty punctuation results in our losing the rhythm of our speech. Usually the writer indicates the broad basis for rhythm by adequate punctuation, but our own smoothness and sense of measure must supplement this.

*PACE*

As a general rule we should talk neither too fast nor too slowly, but we should vary our pace within these limits to avoid monotony, and as the sense and dramatic effect indicate. As an example, the irate parent may speak slowly and emphatically in order to show authority and seriousness of purpose, as in, "I repeat you are not to go." On the other hand asides and words in parenthesis are spoken more rapidly, as in, "I think (and I hope you think so too) that he was in the right."

*INFLECTION*

This is the change made in the pitch of the voice as it passes from one word to another. Inflection may alter

the whole sense of the sentence. In fact it is inflection which helps us to interpret the meaning of a sentence. We should remember two general rules with regard to inflection.

1. When a downward inflection is used, the completion of the sense is indicated, *e.g.*, I am glad to be home.

2. When a rising inflection is used, the sense is incomplete as in exclamations, questions, and contrasts.
*e.g.*, Are you coming?

This is amazing!

It is white not black.

*MODULATION*

Modulation is the change in the pitch of the voice in passing from sentence to sentence or from one paragraph to another. For example, when using parenthesis we alter the pitch of the voice, *e.g.*, We went—as many others did too—to see the magician. Here the pitch of the words in parenthesis is lowered. This use of modulation is also found in asides. Again, normally we raise the pitch of the voice when we pass from one paragraph to another.

*INTENSITY*

Intensity is gained through accent and emphasis.

(*a*) Accent is the stress laid upon a certain syllable in a word. This helps us to differentiate between the two different meanings of a word spelt in the same way.

*E.g.*, Present, present.

Proceeds, proceeds.

(*b*) Emphasis is the stress laid upon a word in a sentence to bring out the meaning of the sentence. By altering the emphasis, that is by transferring it from one word to another, we alter the sense of the sentence.

*E.g.*, This is his book

This is his book

This is his book

Many of these rules can however be achieved through listening to good speakers, and noticing the particular qualities of their speech. A great deal too depends on one's own self-confidence for without it one is reluctant to enter into conversation spontaneously. Seeing good plays too, helps us to keep in mind the highest standards of speech perfection. If we realise the potentialities of speech, we should become aware of the necessity to pay serious attention to elocution, and be prepared to learn the elementary rules of speechcraft.

## CHAPTER IX

### *SOME COMMON IDIOMS*

---

*Within an ace of—* Very near

I came within an ace of being caught

*An act of God—* An inevitable event beyond control of human agency

The terrible earthquake! it was an act of God

*After one's own heart—* Just as one would wish

He was a pupil after my own heart

*Agony column—* The personal column of a newspaper

*In the air—* Indefinite, undecided

The plans were still in the air

*To give oneself airs—* To assume affected manners of superiority

She gives herself airs now she has become successful

*All the go—* In fashion, fashionable

Top hats were all the go last century

*Also ran—* To be among the unsuccessful competitors

She was among those who also ran

*Apple pie order—* Very tidy, precise, systematic

He kept his accounts in apple pie order.

*To back out—* To withdraw from a situation, or project

He backed out of the picnic

*To set one's back up—* To annoy

He sets my back up when he is so obstinate

*To be the backbone of something—* To be the main support

He was the backbone of the team

*A baker's dozen—* Thirteen

*The three balls—* The sign over a pawnbroker's shop

*To bamboozle—* To defraud

He bamboozled the director out of a lot of money

*To be called to the bar—* To be permitted to practise as a barrister

He has just been called to the bar

*To make the best of a bad bargain—* To get the best advantage from adverse situations or circumstances

A persevering man always makes the best of a bad bargain

*Off his own bat—* By his own efforts

He made his money entirely off his own bat

*To beat about the bush—* To avoid coming to the point of a matter

He beat about the bush before he told me what had happened

*Beauty sleep*— Sleep before mid-night

*Bed of roses*— A condition of comfort or luxury

After his appointment, he thought his life would be a bed of roses

*To get out of the wrong side of the bed*— To be temporarily bad tempered

He looks as if he got out of the wrong side of the bed today

*To have a bee in one's bonnet*— To have a good opinion of oneself

He has a bee in his bonnet now that he has become popular

*To make a bee-line for*— To take the most direct route

He made a bee-line for the aerodrome

*To beg the question*— To assume that matter which is under dispute

(To a man charged with beating his wife.) When did you last beat her?

*Best man*— A man who attends on a bridegroom

*A bird's-eye view*— A general view

From the aeroplane, we could get a bird's-eye view of the city

*A black sheep*— A bad-charactered person

He was the black sheep of his family

*Of blue blood*— Of an aristocratic family

She has blue blood in her veins

*To be in a blue funk*— To be very frightened

He was in a blue funk when the policeman caught him

*Once in a blue moon*— Very seldom

I have a holiday once in a blue moon

*To have the blues* To be depressed

He's a very pessimistic man—he always has the blues

*Bohemian*— Unconventional — usually said of artists and litterateurs

*To be in someone's good books*— To be in someone's favour

Because I work hard, I am in my teacher's good books

(Similarly used, with opposite meaning, of bad or black books)

*To be born with a silver spoon in one's mouth*— To be born in wealth

The millionaire's son was born with a silver spoon in his mouth

*To earn one's bread and butter*— To earn one's livelihood

He earns his bread and butter by painting

*To count on*— To rely on

*To make a clean breast of*— To confess the whole truth

The criminal made a clean breast of his crimes

*Bunkum*— Nonsense

They talked a lot of bunkum.

*To build castles in the air*— To plan visionary and impossible schemes

He is always building castles in the air.

*To let the cat out of the bag*— To reveal something inadvertently

I'm afraid I let the cat out of the bag when I mentioned our plan

*To climb down from one's high horse*— To adopt a less bigoted attitude

She climbed down from her high horse when the professor came in

*To live in clover*— To live in luxury

She's lived in clover since she inherited her aunt's fortune

*To give the cold shoulder*— To treat with contempt

He gave the employees the cold shoulder.

*To come up to scratch*— To reach a good standard

After more experience, he'll come up to scratch.

*To crop up*— To happen unexpectedly

The mistake cropped up once or twice during his speech.

*As the crow flies*— In a straight line

The distance from here to there is three miles as the crow fles

*To be at daggers drawn*— To be open enemies

The two cousins were at daggers drawn.

*To throw dust in one's eyes*— To deceive one

He threw dust in my eyes about the company's financial position

*To talk double Dutch*— To say something which is unintelligible

The professor's talk was double Dutch to the dull students.

*Not to be able to get a word in edgeways*— Not to get an opportunity of entering into a conversation

Mrs. Jones was so talkative that I couldn't get a word in edgeways

*To egg someone on*— To incite, instigate

He egged the boy on to steal the money.

*Elbow grease*— Energy used in rubbing on cleaning

You'll never get the silver to shine without a little elbow grease.

*To make both ends meet*— To balance one's expenditure to one's income

They were so poor that they could hardly make both ends meet

*The Englishman's meal—* Tea

*To catch the eye of someone—* To attract someone's attention

I caught her eye as she got up, and then she came over to me.

*To keep an eye on—* To keep a person under one's vigilance

The police are keeping an eye on the movements of the suspects.

*Eye-wash—* Means of deceit

He used a lot of eye-wash to cover up his intention

*To face the music—* To explain one's suspicious actions

He'll have to face the music sooner or later

*To pull a long face—* To look disappointed or disinterested

The child pulled a long face when the sweets were taken away

*A fancy price—* A price above the intrinsic value
He paid a fancy price for the horse.

*Far and away—* Very much
She is far away the best pupil

*Far-fetched—* Incredible.

The story was very far-fetched

*To curry favour—* To seek for approval or favourable attention

He tried to curry favour with his employer.

*To have a feather in one's cap—* To have scored a success

He's passed his second exam—that's another feather in his cap.

*To stand on one's own feet—* To be independent

He wanted to get the job so that he could stand on his own feet

*To be as fit as a fiddle—* Te be in excellent health

After his holiday he was as fit as a fiddle.

*To have a finger in the pie—* To have an interfering interest in something

She's the type who always wants to have a finger in the pie

*To twist someone round one's little finger—* To exert authority over one

She twist her friend round her little finger

*A fish out of water—* A person who feels uncomfortable in his surroundings

The stranger felt like a fish out of water at the party

*Fishy—* Doubtful, suspicious

There's something fishy about that person

*To be flabbergasted—* To be astounded

I was flabbergasted when I heard the story

*To flare up—* To become very angry

He flared up when his son came home late

*To fly high—* To have extravagant ambitions

They fly high now that they have money

*To foot a bill—* To pay a bill

He'll have to foot the bill for the party

*To have forty winks—* To have a short sleep after lunch

*To have a free hand—* To have complete liberty of action

He had a free hand in directing the affairs of the company

*The funny-bone—* The extremity of the elbow

*To be game—* To be prepared to enter into a project

Will you come to the picnic? Yes, I'm game

*A gaol-bird* A person who is frequently sent to prison.

*To gas—* To talk at great length

She gassed the whole afternoon

*To get on one's nerves—* To irritate

Her boasting gets on my nerves.

*The ghost of a chance*— A very slight chance

I don't think she has the ghost of a chance to pass the exam.

*To look a gift horse in the mouth*— To criticise a gift

You shouldn't look a gift horse in the mouth

*To be as good as one's word*— To keep one's promise

She told me she would come and she was as good as her word.

*Sour grapes*— What one says one does not want because it is unobtainable.

Oh, you don't want it now—sour grapes!

*It is Greek to me*— It is unintelligible to me

The conversation was so technical that it was Greek to me.

*On the Greek Calends*— Never

*To please down to the ground*— To please thoroughly

The plan pleased me down to the ground. (Used also with "suit")

*Not to turn a hair*— To be completely unperturbed

The accused did not turn a hair when the charge was read.

*To be hand in glove*— To be very intimate (with a bad purpose)

The spy was hand in glove with the official

*To split hairs—* To give undue importance to fine distinctions

He was always splitting hairs in his arguments

*To have the upper hand—* To be in a position of command

His eldest son seems to have the upper hand.

*To have one's hands full—* To be fully occupied

I have no time to help you as I have my hands full

*To wash one's hands of—* To have nothing more to do with

After his ingratitude, I entirely washed my hands of him.

*Not to care a hang for—* To be entirely indifferent to

I don't care a hang for the result of the examination.

*To get the hang of a thing—* To understand a thing

After a while I got the hang of the problem

*To be hard up—* To be in financial straits

He is always hard up.

*To harp on—* To refer continually to the same subject

I wish you would not harp on my mistakes.

*To keep one's head—* To retain one's control (in difficulties)

The driver of the car kept his head and so avoided the accident

*To talk a person's head off—* To talk incessantly.
When she comes to tea, she talks my head off.

*A heart to heart talk—* A confidential intimate talk
She had a heart to heart talk with the distressed child

*To have one's heart in one's mouth (or boots)—* To be filled with anxiety
My heart was in my mouth when I read the letter.

*To be in seventh heaven—* To be supremely happy
The engaged couple were in the seventh heaven

*To pick a hole in—* To find fault with
She's always picking holes in what I do

*To hope against hope—* To be hopeful in even the most despairing situations
I was hoping against hope that everything would be all right.

*To ride the high horse—* To assume airs of superiority
She rides the high horse now that she has been promoted

*To sell like hot cakes—* To sell very readily
These chocolates sell like hot cakes

*To eat humble pie—* To be obsequious, unduly submissive
He eats humble pie to his employer

*To get the hump*— To be depressed

I get the hump when I hear him grumbling

*To break the ice*— To start a conversation

No one knew what to say, but at last I broke the ice.

*To be Jack-of-all-trades*— To have a knowledge of many trades or occupations

He was Jack-of-all trades, but master of none.

*Go to Jericho*— Go away!

*In a jiffy*— In a moment

Wait—I'll come in a jiffy

*To be as poor as Job*— To be very poor

The old man was as poor as Job

*To kick the bucket*— To die

He said he'd rather kick the bucket than be treated so badly

*To kill time*— To waste time

I was killing time by reading the paper again

*Till kingdom come*— For a very long time

You'll stay there till kingdom come, I suppose

*The sport of kings*— Horse-racing

*A ladies' man*— A man who likes to pay much attention to ladies

*To help a lame dog over a stile*— To assist someone in a difficulty

It is an act of kindness to help a lame dog over a stile.

*To see how the land lies*— To find out the state of affairs

I'll see how the land lies and then come and tell you.

*On his last legs*— At the end of one's resources

The poor man seems to be on his last legs

*To lay down the law*— To be dictatorial

He likes to lay down the law to his wife

*To be in league with*— To be in close co-operation with

He was in league with the instigators of the plot

*To let one down*— To fail to keep a promise

He often lets us down by failing to keep appointments

*To lie low*— To conceal one's intentions; also, to abide one's time, keep quiet or out of the way

He lay low about the plan

*A white lie*— A falsehood which does no harm, and is considered morally justifiable

*The lion's share*— The greater part

He took the lion's share of the profits

*To be at loggerheads with—* To have quarrelled with

They are always at loggerheads with each other

*In the long run—* Ultimately

I think it will be very successful in the long run

*To look before one leaps—* To consider carefully before acting

A wise man always looks before he leaps

*To be long-winded—* To speak tediously at great length

His sermons are very long-winded

*There is no love lost between them—* They dislike each other

There is no love lost between the two sisters

*To thank one's lucky stars—* To be grateful for one's good fortune

You should thank your lucky stars that you escaped.

*A made man—* A man whose fortune is assured

He's a made man now his plan has materialised

*To make mountains out of mole-hills—* To exaggerate trifles

She makes her difficulties seem worse by making mountains out of mole-hills.

*To make it up—* To become friendly again

After a friend's intervention, they made it up.

*The man in the street—* The average man

The man in the street considered peace would soon come.

*To march (move) with the times—* To adapt oneself to changing conditions

Although he is old, he moves with the times.

*To make one's mark—* To attain success, to become well-known

He made his mark by writing poetry.

*Up to the mark—* In fairly good health, average

I don't feel up to the mark this morning.

*Method in one's madness—* Reason in apparently strange behaviour

Although it seemed foolish to us, there was nevertheless method in his madness.

*To go through the mill—* To undergo difficult experiences

I know it's very hard work for I went through the mill myself.

*To speak one's mind—* To speak frankly

I wish you would speak your mind on the matter.

*To throw mud at someone—* To abuse someone

After our quarrel, he threw mud at me.

*Mum's the word—* Be more silent

*To hit the nail on the head*— To succeed in one's aim

Try to hit the nail on the head this time.

*Next to nothing*— Hardly anything, almost nothing

When he started his business, he had next to nothing.

*In the nick of time*— At the critical moment

We caught the thief in the nick of time.

*To nip in the bud*— To suppress at the beginning

We must nip it in the bud before it can do him harm.

*No class*— Of an inferior standard

The amateur player was no class for the professional.

*To be nonplussed*— To be too astounded to speak

I was nonplussed at the suggestion.

*To keep one's nose to the grindstone*— To work hard

Now his exam is near he keeps his nose to the grindstone.

*To hold up one's nose*— To be proud

He holds up his nose now he has got a good position.

*To poke one's nose into*— To interfere, pry into

Please don't poke your nose into my affairs.

*To the nth degree*— To the last degree
She carries her stupidity to the nth degree.

*In a nutshell*— Briefly.
This is the whole story in a nutshell.

*Off colour*— Not in good health
I feel off colour today.

*To be one too many for*— To outwit.
She is one too many for him.

*Out of the blue*— Unexpectedly
They came to me out of the blue.

*Out of sorts*— In poor health
I'm very much out of sorts today.

*To paint the town Red*— To enjoy oneself very much
At carnival time we paint the town red.

*To palm off*— To pass off as genuine something that is impaired
She palmed off the picture on her sister.

*To pay through the nose*— To pay an absurdly high price
She paid through the nose for her hat.

*To peg out*— To die
If this heat continues I shall peg out.

*To cost a pretty penny*— To be expensive

I'm sure that dress must have cost a pretty penny.

*Pidgin English*— Broken English

*To give someone a piece of one's mind*— To tell someone unpleasant truths

When she began to find fault I gave her a piece of my mind.

*Platonic love*— Love, between man and woman, which is devoid of sensual feeling

*To be ploughed*— To fail in an examination

He was ploughed last year, I hope he passes this time.

*To take the plunge*— To take a definite step

You'll have to take the plunge sooner or later.

*To make a point of*— To consider it essential

I will make a point of telling him about your ambitions.

*Puffed up*— Conceited.

*To cut to the quick*— To hurt bitterly

Her taunts cut me to the quick.

*To go to rack and ruin*— To be completely ruined

He soon went to rack and ruin after he started gambling.

*To smell a rat—* To suspect

As soon as he started telling me I smelt a rat.

*Red tape—* Official formality.

*To get on the right side of someone—* To secure someone's favour

When he wanted money he tried to get on the right side of his father.

*To rub up the wrong way—* To annoy

If he rubs me up the wrong way I shall punish him.

*To run down a person—* To defame a person

She is always running people down.

*To give someone the sack—* To dismiss someone from employment

He was given the sack because of his inefficiency.

*To have a screw loose—* To be mentally unbalanced

From his behaviour one would think he had a screw loose.

*A close shave—* A narrow escape

The cyclist had a close shave

*To give someone the cold shoulder—* To treat someone with coldness

She gives me the cold shoulder every time I visit her.

*To sleep like a top*— To sleep soundly

*To be a slow coach*— To be slow worker

He's such a slow coach, I could do the work much quicker myself.

*To be in the soup*— To be in a difficult position

If you take that course you'll be in the soup.

*To stand to reason*— To be logical, reasonable

It stands to reason that under-nourishment leads to ill-health

*To be thick with*— To be very friendly with
She' is thick with all her neighbours

*In hot water*— To get into trouble
You will get into hot water if you do not improve.

*To be wool gathering*— To be absent-minded
I was wool gathering when the lecture was going on.

## CHAPTER X

### *FOREIGN WORDS AND EXPRESSIONS*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Ad extremum | — | To the uttermost |
| Ad lib | — | At one's pleasure, freely |
| Ad infinitum | — | To infinity |
| Aide-de-camp | — | Male attendant on royalty |
| A la | — | In the manner of |
| A la carte | — | From the bill of fare |
| Albergo | — | Hotel (Italian) |
| Alma Mater | — | One's University |
| Annus mirabilis | — | The wonderful year (1666) |
| A priori | — | From something which comes before |
| A propos | — | In regard to |
| Au revoir | — | Good-bye for the present, till we meet again |
| Auf weidersehen | — | Good-bye (German) |
| Auld lang syne | — | Past times |
| A votre santé! | — | To your health! |
| Ave Maria | — | Hail Mary (beginning of a prayer) |
| Beau monde | — | The fashionable world |
| Billet-doux | — | A love letter |
| Blasé | — | Satiated |
| Bon jour | — | Good morning (lit. good-day). |
| Bon marché | — | Cheaply, a good bargain |

| | |
|---|---|
| Bon mot | — Repartee, a witty saying |
| Bonsoir | — Good-evening |
| Bon voyage! | A pleasant journey! |
| Bona fide | — Genuine |
| Canaille | — The mob, common people |
| Canapé | — A small piece of fried bread |
| Chic | — Stylish, smart |
| Coup d'état | — Violent change of Government |
| Débacle | — Overthrow, collapse |
| De die in diem | — From day to day |
| De facto | — In reality |
| De Novo | Anew, afresh |
| De profundis | — Out of the depths |
| Dieu et mon droit | — God and my right |
| Elite | — Aristocratic, exclusive |
| Entente | — A friendly understanding |
| En passant | — In passing |
| Esprit de corps | — Devotion to a group, institution, body, etc. |
| Ex officio | — By virtue of one's office |
| Factotum | — A person who performs a variety of jobs |
| Fait accompli | — An accomplished fact |
| Faux pas | — Mistake, blunder |
| Fra | — Brother, friar |
| Frau | — Woman, wife, Mrs. (German) |
| Fraulein | — A young woman, Miss (German) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Habeas corpus | — | An old English law making it illegal to keep a person in prison without trial |
| Hara-kiri | — | A Japanese custom of committing suicide in honourable circumstances. |
| Hoch! | — | Your health! |
| Humanum est errare | — | To err is human |
| Ich dien | — | I serve (the motto of the Prince of Wales) |
| In camera | — | In secret |
| Incognito | — | In disguise, unknown |
| Ici on parle francais | — | French is spoken here |
| I.e., (id est) | — | That is |
| In esse | — | In actual existence |
| Infra dig. | — | Beneath one's dignity |
| In loco parentis | — | Acting on behalf of a parent |
| In re | — | In the matter of |
| In toto | — | Entirely |
| Ipso facto | — | Apart from all external considerations |
| Locum tenens | — | A doctor who temporarily takes over the practice of another doctor |
| Nom de guerre | — | A pseudonym |
| Nom de plume | — | A pseudonym |
| Nonchalant | — | Carefree |
| Nouveau riche | — | A person who has gained wealth, but not breeding |

| | |
|---|---|
| Nulli secundus | — Second to none, incomparable |
| Par excellence | — Pre-eminently |
| Pari passu | — Simultaneously |
| Parvenu | — A person who has suddenly risen to high social position |
| Pater Noster | — The Lord's Prayer (Our Father) |
| Status quó | Original state |
| Tête-à-tête | — A confidential conversation |

## CHAPTER XI

## *THOUGHTS ON TALKING*

Conversation might be reduced to perfection; for here we are only to avoid multitude of errors, which, although a matter of some difficulty, may be in every man's power. Therefore it seems that the truest way to understand conversation is to know the faults and errors to which it is subject, and from thence every man to form maxims to himself whereby it might be regulated, because it requires few talents to which most men are not born, or at least may not acquire, without any great genius or study. For nature has left every man a capacity for being agreeable, though not shining in company; and there are hundreds of people sufficiently qualified for both, who, by a very few faults that they might correct in a half hour, are not so much as tolerable.

*—Dean Swift.*

But words are things, and a small drop of ink, Falling like dew, upon a thought produces

That which makes thousands, perhaps, millions think.

*—Byron.*

Next to those whose elocution is absorbed in action, and who converse together chiefly with their arms and legs, we may consider the Professed speakers. And first

the Emphatical, who squeeze and press and ram down every syllable with excessive vehemence and energy. These orators are remarkable for their distinct elocution and force of expression; they dwell on the important particulars "of" and "the" and the significant conjunction "and," which they seem to hawk up with as much difficulty out of their own throats, and to cram them with no less pain into the ears of their audience. These should be suffered only to syringe, as it were, the ears of a deaf man through a hearing trumpet; though I must confess that I am equally offended with the Whisperers or Low-speakers, who seem to fancy all their acquaintances deaf, and come so closer to you that they may be said to measure noses with you. I would have these oracular gentry obliged to speak at a distance through a speaking trumpet, or apply their lips to the walls of a whispering gallery. The Wits who will not condescend to utter anything but a "bon mot," and the Whistlers and Tune-hammers who never articulate at all, may be joined very agreeably together in concert; and to these tinkling cymbals I would also add the sounding brass, the Bawler, who enquires after your health with the bellowing of a town-crier.

The Tattlers, whose pliable pipes are admirably adapted to the "soft parts of conversation," and sweetly "prattling out of fashion," but from a rough manly face and coarse features mere nonsense is as harsh and dissonant as a jig from a hurdy-gurdy. The Swearers I have spoken of in a former paper; but the Half-swearers who spit and mince and fritter their oaths into "gad's but,"

"ad's fish" and "demme," the Gothic Humbuggers and those who nickname God's creatures, and call a man a cabbage, a crab, a queer cub, an odd fish, and an unaccountable skin, should never come into company without an interpreter. But I will not tire my readers' patience by pointing out all the pests of conversation nor dwell particularly on the Sensibles, who pronounce most dogmatically on the most trivial points, and speak in sentences; the Wonderers who are always wondering what o'clock it is, or wondering whether it will rain or no, or wondering when the moon changes; the Phraseologists, who explain a thing with all that, or enter into particulars, with this and that and t'other; and lastly, the Silent men, who seem afraid of opening their mouths lest they should catch cold, and literally observe the precept of the Gospel, by letting their conversation by yea and nay. . . . We may consider that those whose tongues hardly seem to be under the influence of reason, and do not keep up the proper conversation of human creatures, as imitating the languages of different animals. Thus, for instance, the affinity between Chatterers and Monkeys, and Praters and Parrots, is too obvious not to occur at once; Grunters and Growlers may be justly compared to Hogs; Snarlers are Curs that continually show their teeth, but never bite; and the Spitfire passionate are a sort of wild cats that will not bear stroking, but will purr when they are pleased; Complainers are Screech-owls; and the Story-tellers, always repeating the same dull note, are Cuckoos. Poets that prick up their ears at their own hideous braying are no better than Asses. Critics in general are venomous Serpents that delight in hissing, and some of them who have got by heart

a few technical terms without knowing their meaning are no other than Magpies.

—*Cowper.*

Boerhaave complains that the writers who have treated chemistry before him are useless to the greater part of students, because they presuppose their readers to have such degrees of skill as are not often to be found. Into the same error are all men apt to fall, who have familiarised any subjeet to themselves in solitude; they discourse as if they thought every other man had been employed in the same inquiries, and expect that short hints and obscure allusions will produce in others the same train of ideas which they excite in themselves.

—*Dr. Johnson.*

The conversation of the Parisians is neither dissertation nor epigram; they have pleasantry without buffoonery; they associate with skill, with genius, and with reason, maxims and flashes of wit, sharp satire, and severe ethics. They run through all subjects that each may have something to say; they exhaust no subject for fear of tiring their hearer; they propose their themes casually and they treat them rapidly; each succeeding subject grows naturally out of the preceding one; each talker delivers his opinion and supports it briefly; no one attacks with undue heat the supposition of another, nor defends obstinately his own; they examine in order to enlighten, and stops before the discussion becomes a dispute.

—*Rousseau.*

When wit is combined with sense and information; when it is in the hands of one who can use it and not abuse it (and one who can despise it); who can by witty and something more than witty; who loves decency and good-nature ten thousand times better than wit,—wit is then a beautiful and delightful part of conversation.

—*Sydney Smith.*

What you keep by you, you may change and mend;

But words once spoken can never be recalled.

—*Roscommon.*

The true gentleman . . . carefully avoids whatever may cause a jar or a jolt in the mind of those with whom he is cast—all clashing of opinion or collision of feeling, all restraint or suspicion or gloom or resentment, his great concern being to make every one at ease and at home. He has his eyes on all his company, he is tender toward the bashful, gentle toward the distant, and merciful toward the absurd. He can recollect to whom he is speaking; he guards against unseasonable allusions or topics which may irritate; he is seldom prominent in conversation, and never wearisome. He makes light of favours when he does them, and seems to be receiving when conferring. He never speaks of himself except when compelled, never defends himself with a mere retort; he has no ears for slander or gossip, is scrupulous in imputing motive to those who interfere with him, and interprets everything for the best. He is never mean or little in disputes, never takes unfair advantage, never mistakes personalities or sharp sayings

for arguments, or insinuates evil which he dare not say out. From a long-sighted prudence, he observes the maxim of the ancient sage, that we should ever conduct ourselves toward an enemy as if he were one day to be our friend. He has too much good sense to be affronted at insults. He is too well employed to remember injuries and too indolent to bear malice. He is patient, forbearing, and resigned on philosophical principle; he submits to pain because it is inevitable, to bereavement because it is irreparable, and to death because it is his destiny. If he engages in controversy of any kind, his disciplined intellect preserves him from the blundering discourtesy of better, perhaps, but less educated minds, who, like blunt weapons, tear and hack instead of cutting clean, who mistake the point in argument, waste their strength on trifles, misconceive their adversary, and leave the question more involved than they find it. He may be right or wrong in his opinion, but he is too clear-headed to be unjust; he is as simple as he is forcible, and as brief as he is decisive. Nowhere shall we find greater candour, consideration or indulgence; he throws himself into the minds of his opponents, he accounts for their mistakes. He knows the weakness of human reason as well as its strength, its province and its limits. If he can be an unbeliever, he will be too profound and large-minded to ridicule religion or to act against it; he is too wise to be a dogmatist or fanatic in his infidelity. He respects piety and devotion; he even supports institutions as venerable, beautiful or useful, to which he does not assent; he honours the ministers of religion, and it contents him to decline its mysteries without assailing or denouncing them.

He is a friend of religious toleration, and that not only because his philosophy has taught him to look on all forms of faith with an impartial eye, but also from the gentleness and effeminacy of feeling which is attendant on civilization.

*—Cardinal Newman.*

It offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundings, who, for the most part, are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb-shows and noise; I should have such a fellow whipped for overdoing Termagant; it out-herods Herod; pray you avoid it. . . . Be not too tame neither, but let your discretion be your tutor; suit the action to the word, the word to the action. O, there be Players that I have seen play, and heard others praise, and that highly, not to speak it profanely, that neither having the accent of Christians, nor the gait of Christians, pagan nor man, have so strutted and bellowed, that I have thought some of nature's journeymen had not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably.

*—Shakespeare.*

Good talking is declarative of the man; it is dramatic like an impromptu piece of acting where each should represent himself to the greatest advantage; and that is the best kind of talk where each speaker is most fully and candidly himself, and where, if you should shift the

speeches round one to another, there would be the greatest loss in significance and perspicuity.

—*Stevenson.*

The highest and best of all moral conditions for conversation is what we call tact. I say a condition, for it is very doubtful whether it can be called a single and separate quality; more probably it is a combination of intellectual quickness with lively sympathy. But so clearly is it an intellectual quality, that of all others it can be greatly improved, if not actually acquired, by long experience in society. Like all social excellencies it is almost given as a present to some people, while others with all possible labour never acquire it. As in billiard-playing, shooting, cricket, and all these other facilities which are partly mental and partly physical, many can never pass a certain point of mediocrity; but still even those who have the talent must practise it, and only become really distinguished after hard work. So it is with art. Music and painting are not to be attained by the crowd. Not even the just criticism of these arts is attainable without certain natural gifts; but a great deal of practice in good galleries and at good concerts, and years spent among artists, will do much to make even moderately-endowed people sound judges of excellence.

Tact, which is the sure and quick judgment of what is suitable and agreeable in society, is likewise one of the most delicate and subtle qualities or a combination of qualities which is not very easily defined, and therefore not teachable by fixed precepts. Some people attain it

through sympathy; others through natural intelligence; others through a calm temper; others again by observing closely the mistakes of their neighbours. As its name implies, it is a sensitive touch in social matters, which feels small changes of temperature, and so guesses at changes of temper; which sees the passing cloud on the expression of one face, or the eagerness of another that desires to bring out something personal for others to enjoy. This quality of tact is of course applicable far beyond mere actual conversation. In nothing is it more useful than preparing the right conditions for a pleasant society, in choosing the people who will be in mutual sympathy, in thinking over pleasant subjects of talk and suggesting them, in seeing that all disturbing conditions are kept out, and that the members who are to converse should be all without those small convenience which damage society so vastly out of proportion to their intrinsic importance.

—*Mahaffy.*

Let me warn those who think it is not worth while taking trouble to talk in their family circle, or who read the newspaper at meals, that they are making a mistake which has far-reaching consequences. It is nearly as bad as those convent schools or ladies, academies where either silence or a foreign tongue are imposed at meals. Whatever people may think of the value of theory, there is no doubt whatever that practice is necessary for conversation; and it is at home among those who are intimate, and free in expressing their thoughts, that this practice must be sought. It is thus, and thus only, that young

people can go out into the world properly provided with the only universal introduction to society—agreeable speech and manner.

—*Mahaffy.*

And there's a lust in man no charm can tame,
Of largely publishing our neighbour's shame;
On eagle's wings immortal scandals fly,
While virtuous actions are but born and die.

—*Harvey.*

One's tongue and pen should be in absolute command, whether for silence or attack; and, more than on any quality of force, business success depends upon that same nicety in the use of words which selects the tactful expression, the modest and simple phrase, in the drawing-room; the sort of nicety which is unobstrusive exactness and delicacy; an artistry which in no way labels itself skilful. But underneath all, the woof of the process is social skill—that skill which is the ability to go back to unadorned first principles with the dexterity of one who has acquired the power to do the simple thing perfectly by having mastered the entire gamut of the complex.

—*Stevenson.*

Men and women range themselves into three classes or orders of intelligence. You can tell the lowest class by their habit of talking about nothing else but persons; the next by the fact that their habit is always to talk about

things; the highest by their preference for the discussion of ideas. —*Buckle.*

If you would be loved as a companion, avoid unnecessary criticism upon those with whom you live. The number of people who have taken out judges' patents for themselves is very large in any society. Now it would be hard for a man to live with another who was always criticising his actions, even if it were kindly and just criticism. It would be like living between the glasses of a microscope. But these self-elected judges, like their prototypes, are very apt to have the persons they judge brought before them in the guise of culprits.

Let not familiarity swallow up old courtesy. Many of us have a habit of saying to those with whom we live such things as we say about strangers behind their backs. There is no place, however, where real politeness is of more value than where we mostly think it would be superfluous. You may say more truth, or rather speak out more plainly to your associates, but not less courteously than to strangers.

—*Helps.*

The fault of literary conversation in general is its tenaciousness. It fastens upon a subject, and will not let it go. It resembles a battle rather than a skirmish, and makes a toil of a pleasure. Perhaps it does this from necessity, from a consciousness of wanting the more familiar graces, the power to sport and trifle, to touch lightly and adorn agreeably, every view or turn of a question

en passant, as it arises. Those who have a reputation to lose are too ambitious of shining, to please. "To excel in conversation," said an ingenious man, "one must not always be striving to say good things; to say one good thing, one must say many bad, and more indifferent ones." This desire to shine without the means at hand, often makes men silent. A writer who has been accustomed to take a connected view of a difficult question and to work it out gradually in all its bearings, may be very deficient in that quickness and ease with which men of the world, who are in the habit of hearing a variety of opinions, who pick up an observation on one subject, and another on another, and who care about none any further than the passing away of an idle hour, usually acquire. An author has studied a particular point—he has read, he has inquired, he has thought a great deal upon it; he is not contented to take it up casually in common with others, to throw out a hint, to propose an objection; he will either remain silent, uneasy, and dissatisfied, or he will begin at the beginning, and go through with it to the end. He is for taking the whole responsibility upon himself. He would be thought to understand the subject better than others, or indeed would show that nobody else knows anything about it. There are always three or four points on which the literary novice at his first outset in life fancies he can enlighten every company, and bear down all opposition; but he is cured of this quixotic and pugnacious spirit, as he goes more into the world, where he finds that there are other opinions and other pretentions to be adjusted besides his own. When this asperity wears off, and a certain scholastic precocity is mellowed down, the con-

versation of men of letters becomes both interesting and instructive. Men of the world have no fixed principles, no ground-work of thought; mere scholars have too much an object, a theory always in view, to which they wrest everything, and not unfrequently, common sense itself. By mixing with society, they rub off their hardness of manner and impracticable, offensive singularity, while they retain a greater depth and coherence of understanding. There is more to be learnt from them than from their books.

—*Hazlitt.*

Discretion of speech is more than eloquence; and to speak agreeably to him with whom we deal, is more than to speak in good words, or in good order.

—*Bacon.*

I made it a rule to forbear all direct contradiction to the sentiments of others, and all positive assertions of my own. I even forbid myself the use of every word or expression in the language which imported a fixed opinion such as "certainly," "undoubtedly," etc., and I adopted instead of them, "I conceive," "I apprehend," or "I imagine," a thing to be so and so; or "it appears to me at present." When another asserted something that I thought an error, I denied myself the pleasure of contradicting him abruptly, and of showing immediately some absurdity in his proposition; and in answering I began by observing that in certain cases or circumstances his opinion would be right, but in the present case there appeared or seemed to be some difference, etc. I soon found the advantage

of this change in my manner; the conversation I engaged in went on more pleasantly. The modest way in which I proposed my opinions procures them a readier reception and less contradiction

—*Benjamin Franklin.*

The honourablest part of talk is to give the occasion; and again to moderate and pass to something else; for then a man leads the dance. It is good in discourse, and speech of conversation, to vary, and intermingle speech of the present occasion with argument, tales with reasons, asking of questions with telling of opinions, and jest with earnest; for it is a dull thing to tire, and, as we say now, to jade anything too far. As for jest, there be certain things that ought to be privileged from it, namely, religion, matters of State, great persons, any man's present business of importance, and any case that deserveth pity; yet there be some that think their wits have been asleep, except they dart out somewhat that is piquant, and to the quick. That is a vein which would be bridled; and generally, men ought to find the difference between saltness and bitterness. Certainly, he that hath a satirical vein, as he maketh others afraid of his wit, so he had need be afraid of others' memory. He that questioneth much shall learn much, and content much, but especially if he apply his questions to the skill of the persons whom he asketh; for he shall give them occasion to please themselves in speaking, and himself shall continually gather knowledge; but let his questions not be troublesome, for that is fit for a poser; and let him be sure to leave other men their turn to speak; nay, if there be any that would reign and take

up all the time, let him find means to take them off, and to bring others on, as musicians used to do with those that dance too long galliards. . . . Speech of oneself ought to be seldom, and well chosen. I knew one who was wont to say in scorn, "He must needs be wise man, he speaks so much of himself." And there is but one case wherein a man may commend himself with good grace, and that is in commending virtue in another, especially if it be such a virtue whereunto he himself pretendeth. Speech of touch towards other should be sparingly used; for discourse ought to be as a field, without coming home to any man.

—*Bacon.*